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BACCARAT

A STORY



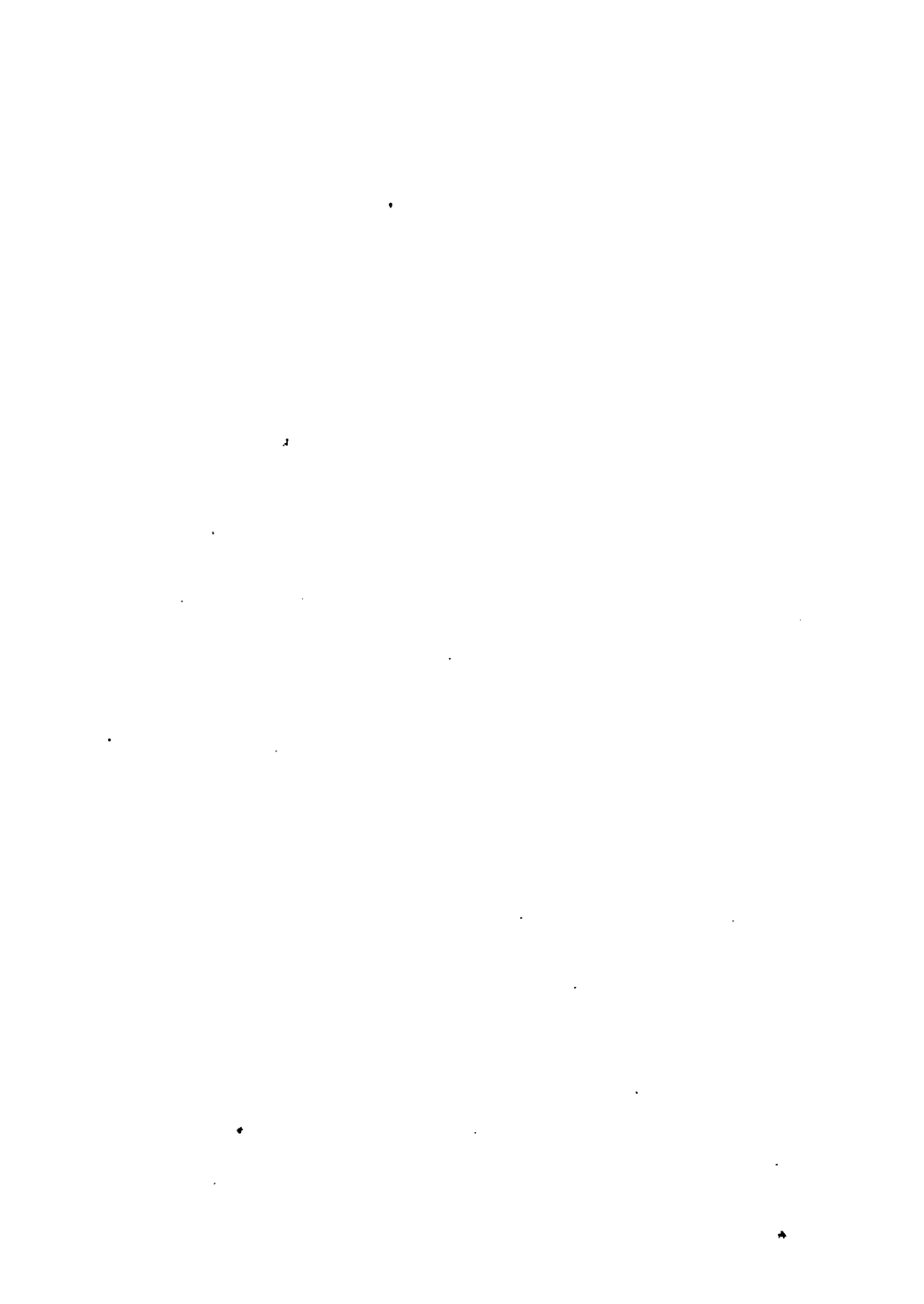
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BACCARAT



Franbau, Julia

♣ BACCARAT ♠

A NOVEL

BY FRANK DANBY



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY PARYS

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1904

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Julie sat on the sands with the children and watched them build their castles
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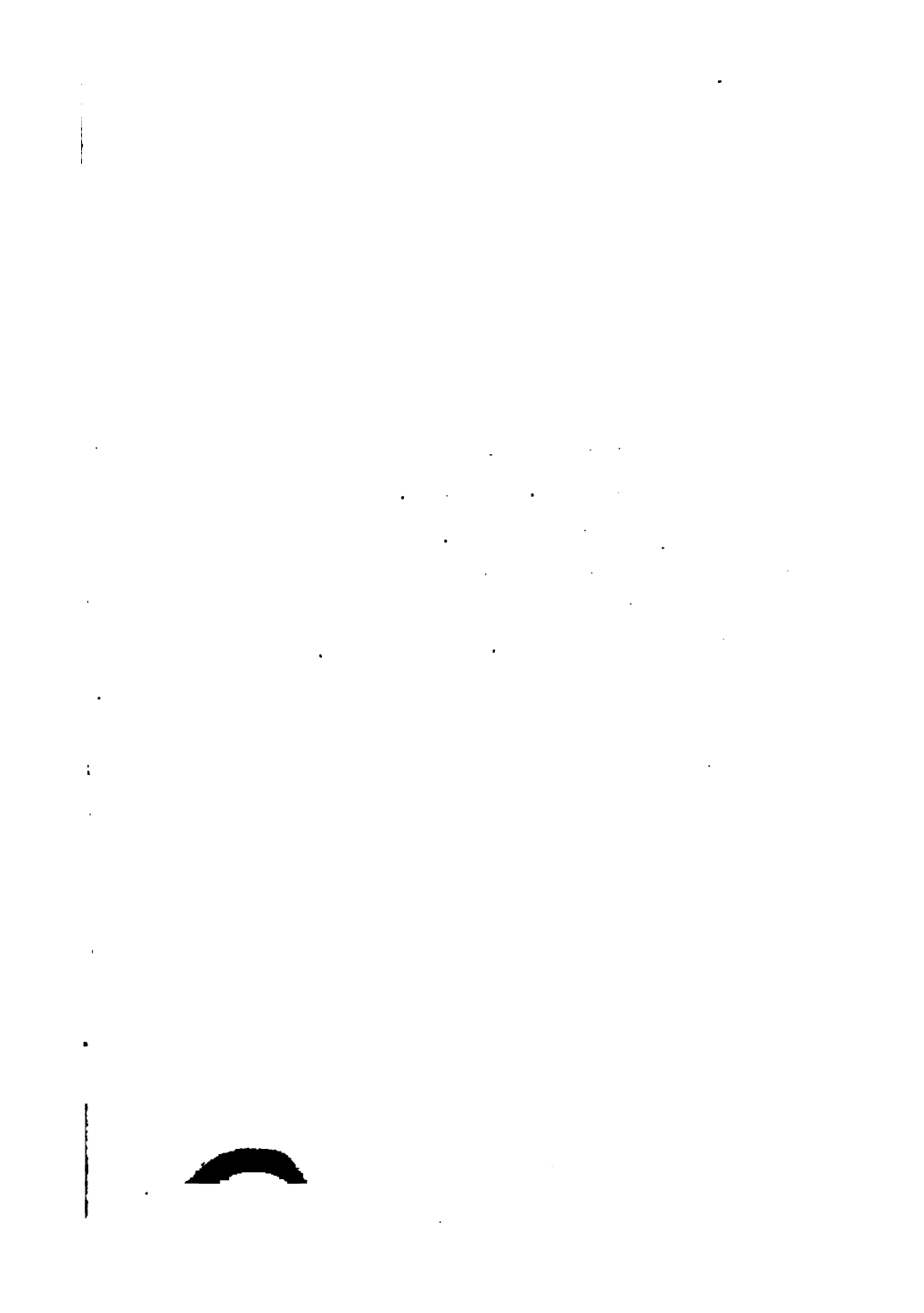
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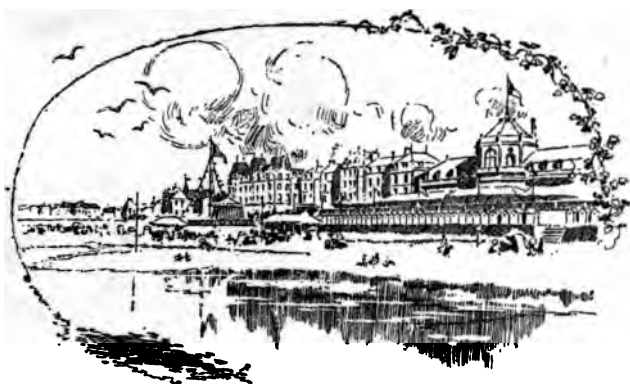
*So do the winds and thunder cleanse the air ;
So working bees settle and purge the wine ;
So lopped and pruned trees do flourish ;
So doth the fire the drossy gold refine.*



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CHAPTER I

"HAVE it your own way," said John Courtney to his wife. "They are young yet, and I should have thought they spoke French pretty well for their ages. But if you've set your heart on a French seaside holiday instead of an English one, why, we must see about finding the right place."

It was an unusually long speech for John, but there was nothing unusual in his saying "yes" to all his wife's requests, nothing unusual in the light that came into his eyes when he looked upon her.

"We ought to go where there are no English families, where they will hear nothing but French from morning until night, where they will play with French children, and get the accent," she went on, from that vantage coign of the stool at

his feet, whence it was so easy to lay a caressing head against his knee. "Is that not so, my John?"

The possessive pronoun came often to her lips when they were alone. It had never ceased to seem wonderful to her that these six solid feet of English manhood, so big and gruff and grey, should belong to her exclusively; *how* exclusively, it was hardly within her to divine.

But, of course, except to Julie, there was nothing very wonderful about John Courtney. He was just a level-headed provincial lawyer, who had gradually established himself in the confidence of his fellow townsmen, from the time when he had been a lanky orphan, and Aunt Sophia had been able to boast:

"There's one thing about my nephew John, you *can* rely upon him; he always keeps his word."

This had been a simple thing to him as a boy; up to now, it had hardly seemed less simple to him as a man.

"Stick to your contract, never mind if you wrote or spoke it; stick to it."

That was the advice you got at John's office; it had come to be a byword in the town, almost a jest. Yet the public probity benefited by it. Young as he was, for his hair was not grey with the weight of years, he had an influence. Men spoke well of him, and deservedly.

Marriage had been a contract with John Courtney. It will be seen how he kept, not only to the letter, but to the unvowed spirit of it.

He and Julie had been married nearly nine years, yet she was still well under thirty, and, although she had borne him two children, her figure, *svelte* and curved and graceful, was almost a girl's figure; her face, with its low brow and dark lashes, its sparkling eyes, and scarlet lips, its piquant dimpling and mobility, was but a girl's face. All these years she had been in John's safe keeping, and she was still fresh and sweet as the day she gave herself to him.

"Oh! *Oui*, it is time I saw my *terre natale* again. Almost I have forgotten it. Picture to yourself, my John, if you had left England eight, nine, ten years, and all suddenly it came upon you, that desire, nostalgia, what you call it, for the 'white cliffs of Albion.'" She mocked his tone, and he smiled down upon her.

"Eh? Did I say that?"

"You don't make speeches, you silent John, you John who never talk. But I have heard that pretty prose, every English one say it. When I saw them first, your white cliffs, I was *triste*, and sick. Ah! but you were waiting. Do you remember?"

"Oh! yes, I remember."

She was never tired of hearing that he remembered.

"And then, at once, you say to yourself ; is it not so ?—'there is she who must be my wife, that little girl on the deck, so forlorn, whose father, I must tell her, is dead, that girl out of the convent who knows nothing, and is worth nothing . . .'"

But he put his hand over her mouth :

"That's enough. Now, about this holiday ?"

She kissed the hand that touched her lips, and went on chattering gaily, exhausting the capacity of a three or four weeks' summer holiday, ranging over all the Normandy and Brittany sea coasts, flirting with the idea, now of this, now of the other, impossible journey.

The house was to be done up whilst they were away. They had been married nine years, and nothing had been done to it. It was small and unpretentious, but they had, each in his or her own way, been very proud of its possession. It is not every man of five or six-and-twenty, in a profession, too, who can start married life in a double-fronted villa in the Mayo Road, Southampton, with a garden at the back, and a garden in front, and a rental of £60 a year. It was true John had had to get the furniture on the hire system. But within three years it was all his own ! The iron bedsteads and the Brussels carpets, the walnut suite in the dining-room, and the ebonised and gilt in the drawing-room, it all belonged to him, to him and Julie, within those three years. He was not satisfied until he was free from debt ; it

had been a struggle, he knew it now, when he was safe, more than safe, beginning to accumulate even, invest, make provision for all eventualities. But it was the struggle and anxiety of those first few years that had turned his hair grey. John Courtney was a big, loose-jointed fellow, rather awkward, with feet and hands too prominent, but the grey hair gave him a touch of distinction. He looked ten years older than his age.

He was a proud man now, as well as a happy one, holding his grey head upright. For the house belonged to him, and the furniture of it, and he had earned it all for her. Julie had helped him loyally. All his friends who had shaken their heads over his marriage with a girl of seventeen, straight out of a convent, had had to admit that, although she was French, and a papist, John had made no mistake. Julie developed a genius for housewifery. She learnt how to cook ; her needlework was a marvel to behold, she could make a blouse or a baby's frock, she found the prettiest way to deck her babies. And always she sang and laughed amid her work, talking gaily of all her little economies, running down to meet John daily at the garden gate, recounting to him, before he had time to get into the house, all the wondrous things she had done or planned, or begun. She was very proud of her home and of her big husband. It isn't every girl of eighteen, without a *dot*, who is mistress of a house, and a big husband.

John did not seem the type of man to whom his wife would chatter such frivolities. He himself had not the gift of flowing language. He was not demonstrative, nor given over-much to speech at all. But she must have known him sympathetic, and divined that he liked to listen, for all these years she had gone on talking.

Gradually they had added, and added always to the hired furniture. They had felt justified in ordering reckless loads of gravel for the pathway to the gate, and grass for the plots on either side of it. The gate was re-painted yearly. Julie's window curtains, flower boxes, and doorsteps were models for suburban Southampton.

A man can afford to indulge his wife's taste for such things when her weekly bills for house-keeping are under £3, and every meal is set before him with the surprise of some new dainty dish. John's pride in his house was eclipsed by John's pride in his wife : but his love for her made both insignificant in comparison.

Julie had learnt English from her mother ; and they had taught it to her too in the convent. They had taught her little else ; she read rarely, she knew England was an island, she could count—with the aid of her fingers. John added up her housekeeping books for her, and dived into the mystery of the weekly washing, with its half-pennies and ninepence a-dozens, and other such intricacies. He praised her frugalities, and thus

made her ambitious about them ; he laughed at her arithmetic, but liked her dependence on him. There had scarcely been a shadow between them in all those nine years. Her gaiety and irresponsible chatter were a constant wonder to John, who was so differently constituted.

Julie talked French sometimes with the children, she had also a French nurse for them ; but still they did not acquire much facility with the language. She had the unstudied, unconscious tact of a gentle heart. She knew her John was wholly English, and, in striving to perfect herself in his language, to make it hers, she was apt to forget she should talk French in the nursery or the school-room.

"That is why we must take them abroad. I forget ; I sing, I talk, to them in English."

"And do you think it matters ?"

"But Jack must go to school next year, and it will make him more forward in his class. And I have the nostalgia, *moi* . . ."

She made a little *moue*, she laid her hand upon her heart, and John laughed, and the matter was practically decided. When August came, instead of Broadstairs or Margate, Birchington of the Bungalows, or Westgate of the seaweed smell, they were to go abroad.

But first, there were endless important matters to be decided ; the house was to be renewed in their absence, new paper and white paint were

to be employed in its beautification. Julie took a whole week, and at least ten journeys to the various shops, to select her chintz covers for the drawing-room. John would buy engravings for the dining-room walls, and oilcloth for the hall. The necessity for strict economy was over ; but it had made its impress. And, of course, it had been the education of a lifetime with Julie.

All the time they were planning for the house they were discussing the merits or demerits of the various French watering-places. Their friends were called into council ; throughout June and part of July, Julie could talk of nothing but where they should go. Boulogne and Dieppe, Wimereux, and Paris Plage were among the first to be rejected. They were too much frequented by English people. Jack and the *petite* Eugénie would hear only English.

Why they should have selected Dives-Cabourg, nobody ever knew, least of all Julie and John. It was one of those accidents, eventful, inexplicable, that are nevertheless of daily occurrence. Trouville had been negatived on account of its expense ; Dinard, because it was too aristocratic ; Etretât had a stony beach ; at Paramé the bathing was dangerous. Who first mentioned Cabourg, John always forgot. But after the name had become familiar, first this one, and then the other, remembered, or had heard, that the bathing was exquisite and wonderful, the hotel comfortable,

and not too dear. Cabourg was near enough to Trouville for gaiety, far enough from it for quiet. The journey was a little too complicated to tempt English people with their families, not sufficiently so, apparently, to make it prohibitive to the Courtneys.

John wrote for the tariff to the *Grand Hotel de Cabourg*. Generally, they had taken apartments when they went away. Once, indeed, they had gone to a boarding house, but this was in their very early days, when three guineas and a-half a week, with everything found, had tempted them to discomfort. But to an hotel they had never before aspired. Julie went blithely about the house until the answer came. She told the children wonderful and endless stories of the joys in store for them; she was much more excited than they were. Already she was devising costumes for herself and for Génie; her only lament or trouble was that Jack must perforce be undecorated; he was past the age for pretty clothes, he must wear knickerbockers, and, alas! there was no place for embroidery on knickerbockers. John suggested that she might "do" an anchor on his sailor collar, and so that grief, too, was assuaged. John always found a way out for her when she was in trouble.

The answer came in due course, it came two whole posts before she would have despaired of it ever coming at all. Yes, they had the rooms—

the price seemed reasonable, even to the Courtneys.
Quand Madame arrivera-t-elle ?

There was enclosed in the letter a book with pictures of the town, and a list of unexampled gaieties, from competitions in sand castles to pigeon-shooting. It appeared there would be dancing for the children, also there were fancy dress balls, concerts, and musical entertainments.

"But, of course, we will do nothing on Sunday ; we will keep your Sunday just the same," said the little papist demurely.

"Oh ! yes ! I see you doing it, when there is any fun on."

John was almost as pleased as Julie. Not because he felt the need for holiday, or the nostalgia of which she spoke, but because her pleasure was infectious, and he caught it easily.

The rooms were booked for the 29th of July. Julie's new dresses were all put briskly in hand. They had a dressmaker working in the house for a whole fortnight ; Julie helped, so it was possible John's cuisine suffered a little during these fourteen days. But the effect of every dress was rehearsed for his benefit, and he found them all "ripping," or "splendid," or "rather smart," according to his limited vocabulary. In reality, he thought she looked beautiful, whatever she wore.

And indeed she was a pretty creature, with her brown eyes and hair, her *riante* face, and soft

skin. English fare and English air had dowered her with a rose-leaf flush.

White drill suits for Jack, blue serge, brown serge, and white muslins for Génie, were bought with a comparatively lavish hand. To hear them all talk ! They were like three children together, and Marie was no better. One would have thought there was only one paradise, and that was Dives-Cabourg ; only one holiday, and that was the one they were going to enjoy.

CHAPTER II

THE final step was to book two sleeping cabins for the steamer. When that was done, there were only the hours to be counted, the days to be ticked off. Already it was the 25th. Two days, three days more, and they would start.

On the 27th, John came home unusually early. Julie, sewing at the window, dropped her work and rushed to meet him. His steps had lagged as he walked up the gravel path. Running into the hall, to relieve him of hat and stick, she began at once ; there was room for only one subject at a time in Julie's mind.

"What is it ? you have heard something, I can see it in your face. Is it that Cabourg is unhealthy for the children ? The cabins, they have been taken ? the steamer, she will not go ? Oh ! don't keep me waiting ; speak, talk, tell me, I cannot bear it else."

She was always foreign in her expressions, in her caressing ways, in her impulsiveness and want of calm. John liked all her ways, all her expressions, everything she said and did. Perhaps it

was this rare marital attitude of his that had made their lives so happy together.

"Cabourg is all right, and nothing has happened to the steamer or the cabins. But Tom Jarvis is coming home on the *Kariboo*, and she is due in Liverpool on the 1st."

The words were curt, the announcement abrupt. But he had hated the news, and the possibility of disappointment for her. It was, however, essential that he should be at hand to meet his first, his best client. Julie would see this for herself. Tom Jarvis, who had prospered in America beyond expectation or belief, would have no one but his old school friend to look after his English interests. John Courtney was his agent and representative ; his appointment to these offices, six years ago, had marked the commencement of the era of prosperity in Mayo Road. Now Tom was coming over, and John must be at his post to explain details, deliver up documents, and take fresh instructions. It was "hard lines," perhaps, that Tom should just choose this week for his arrival, but it wasn't John's way to grumble over the inevitable, and it was clear he must not be away from Southampton.

"Oh ! John, do not say we cannot go. It is too sad, it cannot be ; I have so well arranged. Oh ! John ! and the little ones, they have so much looked forward to it !"

Of course, she was nothing but a child herself ;

tears were near the surface of her pretty eyes, and in her excited voice she cried :

"You cannot say we shall not go. Oh ! we must, we must ; it would be too bad, it is impossible, I cannot bear it."

"Tush ; don't cry out before you are hurt ; I never said you were not to go," he said abruptly.

She followed him upstairs, hung about him whilst he changed his clothes, and was full of endearments and fondlings. These never palled upon him ; John was provincial and stiff, and undemonstrative, and Julie was everything that was different. Perhaps it was the difference between them that had attracted him, and still held him ; but everything she did was right in his eyes, and to deny her, or fail to indulge her whims or wishes, had always been impossible to him. And, in justice to Julie, it must be admitted that hitherto they had generally been very mild little whims and wishes, concerning themselves with new lamp shades, or a *crêpe de Chine* shawl with fringes, a fan, *style Louis XVI.*, or such feminine desires.

Now she had set her heart on the Cabourg trip, and Tom Jarvis was coming over from America !

John hated to see Julie cry, or to have to disappoint her. But it was his duty to be at his place to meet Tom. And, when he saw his duty, he did it, simply. There was not much compromise about John Courtney ; right was right with him, and wrong was wrong, always. He wanted to

gratify his wife, but Tom Jarvis had the right to his representative's attention and personal service.

"Jarvis does not arrive until the 1st. I could run over with you, stay a couple of days to see that you were comfortable, and be back in time to meet him," he said, hesitatingly, when he had finished his dressing to the sound of lament and the sight of tears, and the heart, that was so much larger and so much tenderer than one would have suspected, was unable to bear any longer the spectacle of her grief, without an attempt at solacing it.

"The question is, do you think you will be all right there, without me, say for a week, or perhaps two? I can't get through my business with him under that time; it might take even more."

"Without you!" she echoed in dismay.

"You'll have the children, and Marie."

"But when—how long—? Oh! John, it will be half spoiled."

"I could run over with you; he won't be here until the 1st." He was still undecided. She was all smiles again.

"Oh! that will be good. You will come over with us—you will come back to us; it will be only for a few days you will leave us. Oh! John, how good you are. I could not bear to think that we should not go; my things are all ready. Jane is to have her holiday, everything was so well arranged."

"I don't know about a few days—but I should think there is no doubt I should be free to fetch you at the end of August, or the beginning of September. What do you say to that?"

What he had expected her to say, perhaps, was that she could not be happy without him; that they had never been separated, and she did not want them to be now, and that, if he could not stay with them, she would wait until next year to perfect Jack's French. But what she did say was to call him "*chéri*" and her "own dear John," and to protest that she would be quite happy with the children, and he was not to mind about them, and it was good and sweet and adorable of him to let them go, and she longed to see her own dear land once again. The dinner was interrupted by her caresses and exuberant gratitude.

Julie Courvoisier had not seen her *terre natale*, since she left the convent, where she had been brought up, to join her father, when he lay at the point of death at Southampton.

The Baron de Courvoisier, who boasted that he was an Englishman on the maternal side of his family, and connected with the Cavendishes, and that on the male side he was the last of his great race, had been a well-known character at every gambling centre in Europe. John had met him at Boulogne when John was little more than a boy, and had been impressed at once by his

magnificence and by his condescension. He took a great fancy to John, and he was not above borrowing a few pounds from his new acquaintance, even in those early days. But he was an aristocratic-looking gentleman withal. His long grey moustachios, the red ribbon in his button-hole, his easy loquacity, impressed the young provincial lawyer, callow, and only just out of his articles.

So long as the Baron de Courvoisier had anything left of the estate he had inherited, he went with his wife from one foreign gambling centre to another. That was his occupation, the serious business of his life! The Baron and Baroness corresponded with their new English friend, and when he appeared in his holiday times at Spa or Monte Carlo, Ostend, or Biarritz, they were mutually advantageous to each other. John would always lend a few pounds, although, of course, as he grew older he understood better the people with whom he had to deal; and, of course, the Courvoisiers helped to make his holidays enjoyable and varied. Madame la Baronne found him *sympathique*. She had still the remains of beauty, the gayest spirit in good fortune, the bravest in adversity. John admired her always, and was on the brink of a passion for her, when she was nearing the fifties and he still twenty-two. But he recovered himself in time, and remained her admirer only. Once he went

with her to the convent school at Liège, where her daughter was being educated, but on this occasion he had not seen Julie. Only he heard endlessly about her, and was shown her various photographs.

The Baron talked often, somewhat grandiloquently, about the day when his affairs should be put in order, when he would show John the papers establishing his connection with the great English family of the Cavendishes. He built word castles in the air. His daughter spoke English to perfection, one day she would stay at Chatsworth, the Duchess would present her at Court; they were cousins, of course John knew that? He traced the connection and dwelt upon the ramifications of the family tree. But in truth the end of most conversations between John and the Baron de Courvoisier was the request for a *léger emprunt*.

John had known them four or five years, in this desultory holiday-resort way, before the Baroness died, and the Baron succeeded in leaving at the tables the last remains of his fortune. He came to Southampton only to die; and it was John who saw that he wanted for nothing. The excuse that brought him was the claim to a share in the estate of the late Sir William Cavendish. Very soon John discovered that the Cavendish and Courvoisier connection had no marriage certificate attached to it. But he did not tell the old man

what he knew. The Baron had not long to live ; he telegraphed for his daughter to come to him, and awaited the event.

John had nearly had a grand passion for the mother, who was almost in the fifties. What effect could Julie produce upon him, with her marked brows and dancing eyes, her scarlet lips and the dimples that played around them, her demureness and pretty piquancy, the coquetry, so arch and childlike and obvious, that began to show itself so soon after she had recovered from the shock of the bad news with which she had been met.

It was within a few short weeks of her father's death, encouraged perhaps by this same coquetry, moved more certainly by the knowledge that she had no friend in the world but himself, that John somewhat haltingly and stiffly asked the young girl if she could make up her mind to marry him.

Before he had got out his proposal, before he had finished speaking, she was laughing and sobbing in his arms.

She had been so *triste* sometimes, and knew not what she should do ! The Sister who had come over with her had said she must go back to the convent, and be a servant to them, or, at best, she might teach the little ones, for she had neither money nor home. She did not want to go back to the convent ; she would like to stay here, and marry herself with him. She would

love him, and be, oh ! so good, and no trouble. For she was lonely, and if he had not asked her to marry him she must have gone back to the convent, perhaps to be a nun, she who was so young and wanted to be free. Oh ! he was good to keep her here.

The love, which was latent and awkward and shy, threw down great roots whilst she clung to him sobbing, grateful to him for helping her out of her difficulties. She was almost a child, younger even than her seventeen years. John made no vows. But, as he held her slender figure in his arms, as, shyly, reverentially almost, his lips touched her hair, he knew his life was hers henceforth. His soul was great enough for love, and Julie flooded it.

The love had not grown less with years. There was much of the perpetual child about Julie, although she had developed, under Aunt Sophia's tuition, such surprising housewifely qualities. Her deftness in needlework was an inheritance from her mother ; her thrift, and love of neatness and order, were from her convent education. Her gaiety never failed her, nor her lightness of spirit, and if, as his friends said, John spoiled her, he had this excuse, that he owed to her an ideal home, wherein children played and prattled, and the mother laughed and sang, and all was sweet and orderly, with love enough to smooth over inevitable frets or small petulances.

They had small means, and hired furniture, and the responsibilities and anxieties of his married life turned conscientious John's hair grey before he was thirty. But they had no real troubles in their married life until the much talked of Cabourg holiday had begun.

The bad journey with which it started was ominous. Many times in the days that came John thought of the omen of that stormy crossing.

CHAPTER III

THEY started on the very day that they had fixed. John found he could take them over, and even remain one day with them at Cabourg. But in July of that year there was exceptionally bad weather. The passage from Southampton to Havre was both rough and prolonged, and, although the children slept peaceably through wind and storm, Julie proved the worst of travellers, sick, nervous, and easily exhausted. John spent the night in nursing her and scolding her alternately, trying to chaff her out of her fears, then soothing them, rather distracted by his position than irritated. He had never known the meaning of either nerves or sea-sickness, being used to the sea from childhood, and essentially phlegmatic and unimaginative. But already he wished he had not yielded to her desire to come abroad. It was going to be a failure, this French holiday, he felt already. When they arrived at Havre, Julie was too ill to continue the voyage. A few hours later, when she had recovered, the storm had not abated, and the harbour authorities

would not allow the boat for Trouville to start. So they slept that night, knowing no better, at the miserable, dirty *Hôtel de la Plage*. And thus John lost the opportunity of remaining one day with them at Cabourg. He made light of it, of course, but it did not prove a trivial matter.

The short journey from Havre to Trouville, in the wretched unseaworthy boat, again tried Julie's fortitude severely, and this time even the children suffered.

"You'll have to come back *viâ* Paris," said John, to raise their spirits. Yet no one had ever suspected him of the gift of prophecy.

But Trouville was reached at last; and John relieved the tedium of the hour and a half wait, preliminary to the final hour in the train, by giving them a French *déjeuner*. Before it was over Julie had almost recovered her gaiety. She uttered whimsical reproaches against herself for having been ill; she told Jack that she should change clothes with him and become a sailor, for, evidently, that was the career for which she was fitted. She broke into French, and when the children ate on stolidly, not being able to follow her, she used it as an argument to prove to John that the sacrifice of that *voyage horrible* was necessary for their education.

They had a railway carriage to themselves. Julie had forgotten the French trains were so high! John must help her up the step. She was

pleased with the grey cushions, and the white antimacassars, of thread lace, with everything.

The train that took them along the Normandy coast wound slowly through woods and valleys, then climbed the steep gradient of green-clad hills. Between these they saw their enemy the sea, turned to grey grandeur and illimitable distance. Presently they stopped at Villers, the first of the towns with their feet in the sea, and their heads in the greenery, that divide the coast between them. Then came Houlgate. Julie, the children, even John, wished it had been Houlgate they had selected, so beautiful and peaceful it looked as it slumbered on the sands amidst its trees. But the very next station was Cabourg! They had little time to regret Houlgate, for here they were at their destination, and now the excitement would begin.

There was little green at Cabourg. The faces fell, as they read the name, as they realised that, for the first time since they had left Trouville, there was no scenery, there were no verdure-clad hills, all was flat, and bare, and unlovely.

The disillusionment of Cabourg lasted throughout John's short stay. Cabourg was just a circular row of houses and hotels, an esplanade, the sea. There was nothing about it to excite, or hold, the imagination. In truth there seemed no breadth nor depth in it for the tragedy that followed. Behind the circular sweep of buildings lay only a mean village, and then the station, amid flat

building land, with boards announcing they were *à louer*. Nothing could have been more dull and unattractive.

But, now they were here, Julie would not let John see her disappointment. She told him she was sure they would be very happy, the sands were magnificent, broad, yellow, and sunny. She liked her rooms, her bedroom that overlooked the sea, and the children's, on the opposite side of the corridor, that gave on to the garden and tennis court of the hotel. She did not want John to go away and think they would not enjoy this holiday, which they had planned with such anticipation, which would cost them so much more money than their English holidays. So she found the air good, and the food good, and the beds good ; all to please John.

And, gradually, under the influence of her determined optimism, the children began to run about wildly, and to picture unheard-of pleasure, and John, reassured, set about doing what he could, in the short time before him, to ensure her the attentions of the manager and the staff, to secure her a table by the window for her meals, to get an *abonnement* for her and the children for the Casino, even to go down to the *Etablissement de bains*, and buy two dozen bathing tickets for them.

"Good-bye, my little John, you have been good, you have been sweet, you will come back to us

so soon that Mr. Jarvis leaves, that horrid Mr. Jarvis!" She pouted at his name.

"Well, have a good time and take care of yourself and the children. Now good-bye to you all and—and God bless you, my dear."

John was not demonstrative, but he took a last embrace of his wife with rather more feeling than was common to him in public. It was the first time they had been separated. There was no one that knew him at Cabourg station, and he kept his head out of the carriage window as long as the white figure, and the handkerchief she waved in farewell to him, were in sight.

Already, walking back from the station, she missed him. Her heart sank at the prospect of the weeks before her, in this dull, ugly town. She had hardly realised, when she had clapped her hands and capered and revelled in the prospect of her novel jaunt, that she would have no one to talk to but Marie and the children, that John would not be there.

She had leaned on him during all the short years of their married life, as before she had leaned on the teachers, or the head of the class, or the Mother Superior, or anybody. She had not learnt to stand alone. Notwithstanding her twenty-eight years she had not yet learnt independence.

Now, this strange holiday began by her dining, alone, at that table by the window which John had secured, by her wandering into the spare empty

drawing-room to look at the papers, alone, by her venturing alone into the gaily lighted Casino, and coming out at the end of ten minutes, because she was suddenly shy or ashamed, or frightened at her solitude in the midst of the crowd. She was glad of Marie's company, as she undressed and went to bed at 9.30 !

It was not so bad in the morning. Julie sat on the sands with the children, and watched them build their castles. She was a good swimmer, and went into the sea afterwards. She had *déjeuner*, and rested when Cabourg rested. But there was no John to whose home-coming she could look forward. The solitary dinner and the long hours of the evening began to depress her. So passed the first two or three days.

The Grand Hôtel de Cabourg, the Casino, and many of the villas and dependencies belonged to two brothers, the Messieurs Bertrand. One of them was Mayor of Cabourg.

The interests of the brothers and of the town were identical. That people should come, should stay, should come again and bring their friends, was essential to the growth and the prosperity of the little seaport. But hitherto it had lacked the English. It would be a pity if Madame Courtney went back and reported badly of her holiday. Yet it was easy to see she was bored ; the chambermaid heard it through her *bonne*, and so it filtered through to them.

It certainly seemed a pity that the *jolie Anglaise s'ennuierait ainsi*. But the other visitors at the hotel were there with their wives and families, or with their lady friends, and Madame was alone, and no doubt felt isolated in the midst of the gaieties. For Cabourg was gay, there was no doubt about that; gaiety was the end to which every one in authority worked loyally. There were Chinese lantern *fêtes*, and *Batailles de Fleurs*, there were fancy dress balls, and cotillons, there were *Bals d'Enfants*, and *Rallye-paper*! Also there were pigeon-shooting and horse-racing, and always the vicinity of Trouville and Deauville, with the Grand Prix, and plenty of high play at the various neighbouring casinos.

That evening Monsieur Bertrand, the one who was Mayor of Cabourg, and a personage in his way, spoke to Julie as she was hesitating between a solitary walk and looking on for half an hour at the *petits chevaux* in the Casino. He said "*Bonsoir*" to her as she stood in the hall, and he asked her if she was going to the dance to-night, if she liked Cabourg, and amused herself here. She had already wondered who he was, this stout and prominent Frenchman, who was always surrounded with friends and acquaintances, to whom every one talked, and who appeared so popular. She was delighted to be addressed by him, she smiled and dimpled at

him, charming him with her friendliness and pretty gestures, and exaggerated sadness. She was dull, she was unhappy, she had left so good a husband, and now she was all so alone, and nobody did talk to her, and she loved to talk; that was what she told him.

"But how well Madame speaks French," he exclaimed, in surprise.

"*Mais, je suis Française ! Monsieur, j'avais une quinzaine d'années avant que je visse l'Angleterre,*" she exclaimed. Finally, Monsieur Bertrand heard that she was the daughter of Jules Courvoisier !

Monsieur Bertrand, who had a share in the *Etablissement* at Aix les Bains, as well as the Casino at Cabourg, remembered perfectly Monsieur le Baron, her father. He even recalled having seen him once in Spa with his *petite fille*. And so the *petite fille* had grown up, and had married an Englishman ! *Etonnant !* it seemed like yesterday that he had seen them.

There was a lady at Cabourg with Monsieur Bertrand ; he presented her to Julie, and Madame, it appeared, also remembered *cet élégant Monsieur, le Baron de Courvoisier*. The very next afternoon Julie drove with them in their automobile to the Deauville races, and felt she was at last beginning to enjoy herself. Her natural gaiety bubbled up again quickly with her new friends. The Bertrands said it was absurd that Julie should be bored at Cabourg, it was the very place for her !

The Baron d'Avril joined them at the races ; he was presented to Julie, and he too found her quite agreeable. He had his own automobile, and he begged that she would drive back with him, instead of making a third with the Bertrands. But an automobile is not very conducive to conversation, and their acquaintance made little progress during the drive. Later on, after dinner, they met again.

Naturally he stopped to talk once more to *cette charmante petite femme*, who, as Bertrand had told him, was a daughter of *ce vieux beau, Le Baron de Courvoisier*, whom he remembered ten years ago at Monte Carlo and Ostend. She was so glad of companionship ; she was so gay, and friendly. She was alone. The Baron had no hesitation presently in asking her to go with him into the *cercle*. He had come to Cabourg to play baccarat. For the rest . . . well, the Baron liked a pretty woman as well as most men ; but he was a heavy, not to say dull, conversationalist, and it was early in the evening. They would play a little now.

The *Salon réservé aux lectures*, for that was what was inscribed over the door, seemed a dull-looking place to Julie. It had no temptation, no danger, no attraction for her. No one was talking, a few people sat about reading and writing, and that was all.

"What for you bring me here ?" she asked gaily. "It is dull, *triste*, the air is bad, close."

They had strolled past the *petits chevaux*, and

the unfriendly French mothers with their needle-work and closely guarded daughters.

"Ah ! but we must pass through here to get to the *cercle*," he said, "the other way is longer."

It seems incredible, but she did not realise whither he was taking her. Baccarat was an unknown amusement to her. "Gambling" was a word she had forgotten or had never heard. The convent had shielded her youth, her mother had concealed from her the knowledge of her father's habits, suffering rather the pangs of her starved maternity. John had guarded her adolescence. Her ignorance was complete.

There was a leather double-door at one end of the *Salle de Lecture*. It was discreetly shut and guarded, and an attendant, seated at a table, acted Cerberus. But he rose deferentially to allow the Baron and his lady to pass.

The Baron d'Avril had a brown moustache and good-natured, sleepy blue eyes. He was inclined to be stout, although his height carried it off. He wore a tiny red wheel of ribbon in his button-hole, and his Baronne was *très grande dame*, exclusive, *dévoté*, very charitable. They were a model couple, but the Baron travelled much—for his health. At Pau, and at Aix, at Monte Carlo, and at Trouville he shot pigeons, and played *trente et quarante*, or baccarat, and even *pokaire*, but always with discretion and the preservation of his dignity.

It seemed to Julie that because Monsieur Bertrand had known her father, because the Baron d'Avril had also known him, she was suddenly among friends. Julie had acquired English habits and modes of thought. The Baron, however, who looked at her readiness to accompany him from his own point of view, was incredulous at hearing that the daughter of Courvoisier had never even seen baccarat played, incredulous, too, perhaps of her innocence, unworldliness, of all that her life with John had preserved to her.

She was curious, interested, eager as a child, when she had entered the room, and saw the line of men and women, three deep round each of the tables, under the glare of the lamps, and heard the cry of the croupiers :

"La banque est aux enchères, qui prend la banque? Une fois, deux fois, cent francs à la banque. Messieurs, faites vos jeux," and was caught in the toils of the mysterious fascination of the scene. She asked eagerly for an explanation of this or that, question after childish question came volubly from her.

"Might she play too? Could anybody play? Would Monsieur arrange it? It seemed so amusing. *Dieu*, what was a 'pass,' and why had that Monsieur the cards again, and yet again?"

If she had not been a young woman, graceful, piquante, pretty, Monsieur le Baron might have been too busy to enlighten her; but, as it was,



She was curious, eager, interested as a child, when she had entered the room
and saw the line of men and women, three deep round each table,
under the glare of the lamps

he told her everything about the game, and interspersed his explanations with compliments.

The gambling, at first, was of a comparatively mild and limited order. There were three tables in the room, and at the one where she stood they were playing *chemin de fer* with five-franc pieces. At another, small banks of five, ten, or fifteen louis were being held by first one and then another of the guests. But the centre table was unoccupied. The big punters had not yet arrived. Monsieur Bertrand generally appeared at such a juncture, playing for ten minutes or so with a bank of twenty-five Louis, making himself always agreeable, and retaining his popularity. To-night, however, Monsieur Bertrand shook his head when the croupier looked his way. The rooms were very full, yet it seemed there was no banker for the middle table, and there, too, they would have to resort to *chemin de fer*.

Then, all at once, there was a little bustle or stir in the room. Julie, who was standing gazing about her with those dancing brown eyes of hers, noting everything, interested in everything, pleased with everything, in the strange new scene, heard a quiet—

“*Pardon, Madame.*”

She was conscious for half a second of the regard of a pair of keen black eyes, as some one passed quickly behind her, and made a low-voiced remark in the ear of the croupier. The croupier

called the *chef de parti*. It was evident there was something in the wind.

Monsieur Diderot, apparently, was new to the rooms. The keen black eyes that had noted Julie's charming face were those of Monsieur Diderot, with his carefully waxed moustache and black imperial, his assured manner.


After that short colloquy between the croupier and the *chef de parti*—

"*Cinquante louis en banque, Messieurs,*" was announced in a loud voice, with the ordinary jargon of the tables.

When every one possible was seated, and the rest were standing behind, and obvious interest was centred, it was explained that Monsieur Diderot would take a bank of a thousand francs, but that he would play with one *tableau* instead of two, a new variety of the game of baccarat, and that the minimum stakes were to be one louis. When the terms were agreed to, Monsieur Diderot took his place.

Seats had been found for Julie and the Baron d'Avril, and now, indeed, she began to find herself entangled in a drama of supreme, of vital, interest.

Under the direction of the Baron d'Avril she changed a note into five round red counters; she was taught to push one over the line. And in the very first deal she became the proud and surprised possessor of two, where there had been only one



red counter. Of course, she did not quite realise why the man with the great quaint wooden butter-knife had slapped that little present over to her, and had even demurred about taking it, to the infinite amusement of one or two of the players, and of the Baron d'Avril, and to the impatience of the croupier, who thought she was protesting that he owed her more.

Of course, it was not, at first, the actual gambling itself that attracted her. Money was not very important to her except for its purchasing power. Money was John's affair, he had always given her what she asked, praising her economies. But she liked being with all these people, one with them, doing what they did. She had been so dull and alone here until now.

Every one was in good humour that first evening, for the bank began by losing all the *coups*, and even a pass of three had not yet occurred in its favour. It was like an animated private party, they seemed to be all friends, and she amongst them. This one asked her to stake for him, and the other was interested in hearing she had won — *un, deux, cinq louis*!

Presently the "*à moi la main*," or "*à vous la main*" became "*à Madame la main*," and the butter knife handed her two cards. She took them up rather timidly, hardly knowing what she must do with them. It was the Baron who looked over, and called out *neuf*, excitedly, and

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told her to throw them face upwards on the table.

After that it began to come easier and easier to her. She was so pleased at giving pleasure, and the cards she had seemed to give pleasure to every one. She looked at them, and there was always a king, or a queen, and an eight or a nine. She understood now, and excitedly she threw them on the table, and cried *huit*, or *neuf*, as the case might be, and saw her pile of louis grow and increase quickly. It was the easiest thing in the world to win money at baccarat. And the crowd murmured a little applause. "*Madame a de la chance*," "*Madame joue bien*."

Presently there was a king and then a five, and under her neighbour's prompting, Julie cried, in answer to the banker's mechanical, "*J'en donne*."

"*Carte*."

He gave her a four, and again she turned up the others and cried *neuf*, and heard with exhilaration the laughing applause and the "*Bien tire*," "*Bon tirage*"—"A pass of eleven against the bank!—*incroyable*!"

It was very different from last night, and the night before, when she had been so homesick and lonely.

People left the other tables, and clustered around where Julie sat. She felt she had done something very clever, to have a pass of eleven. She laughed, and acknowledged the compliments, and

handled the big pile of red counters always more boldly.

When "*Fin de la taille*" was announced, and all the cards were shuffled up again, it was already eleven o'clock. Marie would be sitting up for her, she dared not stay longer.

But she had enjoyed the evening ; there is something in heredity, perhaps. Anyway, the whole atmosphere had been congenial to her. Although she had reluctantly to leave the table now, she promised herself she would come back another time.

The Baron, first carefully protecting his seat, went with her to the *Caisse*, and there, in exchange for her counters, they gave her, not only her own note, but five others, and three more louis, and she was altogether exhilarated and excited by her good fortune, and thought she had some special gift or talent for play, and that soon, very soon, she would be able to write to John that she had won enough money for a *dot* for little Eugénie, and that now he need not work so hard, and could be more at home with her. She was effervescent and bubbling with her success, and had none of the decorum of the experienced player.

The Baron d'Avril found her very charming, if a little unusual. He could not understand why she should retire so early ; but the way she responded to his inquiry hardly made it clear to him. There was always time, of course.

For it seemed to him he was *en veine* to-night ; that the bank was in for a spell of ill-luck. He did not want to miss another pass. He bowed over her hand with *empressement*, when she bade him good-night and thanked him for bringing her into this charmed circle. He did not suggest, however, accompanying her back to the hotel, he contented himself with hoping they would meet again to-morrow. He was a *joueur*, not a man of gallantry, *ce Monsieur le Baron d'Avril*, except, perhaps, incidentally.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning when the table broke up. The Baron d'Avril, and indeed the majority of the players, had won largely. Baccarat, with one *tableau*, came immediately into favour. There was much discussion about it, and Monsieur Diderot, who had held the bank all the evening, and had lost about eight thousand francs, was almost a popular hero. He took his sudden popularity, as he had taken his losses, with indifference, insouciance. He explained to one or two who spoke to him that he had seen baccarat played with one *tableau* at Wimereux, and that he himself thought it was a fairer game for the punters, and that it made the chances more even. For himself, he liked an even chance.

It was difficult to classify Leon Diderot. Whilst some were inclined to think he was a gentleman, gambling for pleasure, it filtered through the room that he was a professional,

and that he held the bank on behalf of an association, who found the capital. When he had answered a few more questions, almost monosyllabically, he slipped away with an inclusive "*Bonne nuit !*" It was then that the argument about him and his "one *tableau*" reached its height.

The Baron d'Avril did not join in the personal discussion. It was self-evident to him that, whether private or professional, whether he had been playing for amusement or gain, Monsieur Diderot was *bourgeois*, uninteresting. But the, at present, unlegalised, new way of playing baccarat was profoundly interesting. The Baron made calculations and compared them, and did not go to bed till past four, having completely forgotten Julie Courtney, and what he was pleased to consider his "*succès*" with her.

Perhaps he would have remembered it in the morning ; but in the morning, as it happened, he received a *petit bleu* from the Baronne. She had selected the very next day for her arrival at Villers. She wished her husband to join her there, and to carry out certain domestic instructions that she gave him. Of course he must obey the summons, Madame la Baronne's orders were always carried out. If the Baron did not leave Cabourg with alacrity, at least he left it with fortitude, with a nonchalant, wholly French, shrug of the shoulders, and a characteristic acceptance of destiny.

Villers is only an hour's run from Cabourg. He calculated he could return by the end of the week. In the meantime it was satisfactory to be taking with him nearly two thousand francs ! If he had remembered Julie Courtney at all in the morning, it was not to an extent that disturbed him in the performance of his duty to Madame la Baronne.

CHAPTER IV

THE day after her first introduction to the *Cercle*, Julie found herself rather bored, and even less inclined than before to enjoy her own company, She wandered about disconsolately in the early morning. She saw the Bertrands depart on their motor for Caen, where they were to spend the day. Monsieur Bertrand had introduced Julie to the Baron d'Avril, he had recognised that the Baron had given her the freedom of the *Cercle*. It did not seem to him, or to his companion, that there was more to be done for Julie. They would amuse themselves, they would both enjoy Cabourg. *Presto!* the thing was done. Monsieur and the temporary Madame Bertrand could now devote themselves to each other with an easy mind.

But the Baron had been summoned to Villers ; that they could not know.

The monotony of the hot sandy *plage*, the sight of the white-capped *bonnes*, with their wizened, dark-skinned French babies, the rattle with which the sweetmeat sellers announced their approach, the babel of mothers and children, were not

calming to the nerves that had been unstrung by the excitement of the previous evening. The crawling sea, with its waveless, slow-incoming tide, was untempting; but when at length she had made up her mind to bathe, when she found herself out of her depth, the warm salt buoyancy soon exhilarated her. She swam on, and on, until she had forgotten her *ennui*, her rasped nerves, the monotonous morning, and the heat of the summer noon.

It was strange that when, happy and cool in her clinging bathing-dress, she emerged from the sea, she should have almost run into the arms of Monsieur Diderot, the *banquier* whose advent last night had been the signal for her exciting hour, and to whom she owed her large winnings, and that wonderful series of cards.

For she was still a little confused as to the details of the play. She only knew it was this Monsieur who had given her the eights and nines that had taken all the money. Of course she blushed when she saw him standing so near the encroaching sea; that beautiful wild-rose flush she owed to English air. Of course she was at once conscious of her bare feet and of her clinging gown. He raised his hat immediately, for the blush did not escape him. He did not recollect her, but it was evident she knew him. He had an eye, this Monsieur Diderot, and her contours satisfied it. They were all slender and curved,



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Monsieur Diderot



and exquisitely moulded. From beneath the close, red bathing cap escaped black tendrils of hair, which meandered over a white forehead, above brown, bewitching eyes. The mantling colour in her cheeks was less red than the scarlet softness of her lips. She could not but smile in answer to his greeting, and it seemed long until Marie hurried to her with her *sortie de bain*. The piquant face, which grew red and then pale again, which dimpled as it smiled, and showed the even gleam of her teeth, was set on a slender pillar of white neck. Her modesty, feigned or real, was exquisite. Monsieur Diderot turned round quite deliberately to watch her graceful rush to her bathing-machine. Her ankles were thin ; her limbs the perfection of form. All his senses were titillated by what he saw.

He relit his cigarette, when she was out of sight, with the expression of a *gourmet* whose palate has been pleased. It was only his second day in Cabourg, but he began to think it was well he had come. He waited about the *plage* and the esplanade, with the *Petit Journal* and his cigarette, comfortable in his light shirt and straw hat, notwithstanding the heat, until he saw her re-emerge from her dressing-room. Her hair was too long to dry quickly ; the long, loose knot into which she had twisted it showed its luxuriance. She had not yet put on her hat, for the children were waiting for their *déjeuner* ; the pretty tendrils

waved about the pretty forehead. She blushed again as she saw him waiting.

Now he remembered her. It was she who had been with the Baron d'Avril the previous night. But the Baron d'Avril had left Cabourg that morning. Leon Diderot could make no mistake, therefore, in addressing her. But, although he turned his steps so that he met her face to face, he had no opportunity to take advantage of the timid recognition she gave him. A little boy and girl rushed up to her with :

"Mother, we're waiting lunch for you."

"Mother, what a long time you were in the water ; we thought you were going to swim back to England." She smiled and answered them caressingly, and with one on either side she passed into the hotel.

It was later in the day when, in the Casino, just as he was passing through into the rooms, he saw her again. She was watching the horses go round, and leaning over to place a coin on a number. She must already have learned something of the pleasures of play. And this afternoon, in the Casino, many of the players of last night had recognised and bowed to her ; she no longer felt so solitary and isolated. She looked charming in her simple white frock, with the red band that drew attention to her small waist, with the wide hat that made her face small and child-like under its crown of red cherries.

"Madame is superstitious about numbers?" Diderot asked, after he had stood beside her a moment or two, noting that it was on the eight or nine she staked always her ten centimes. She turned to him quite frankly :

"Oh ! yes ! I think they are my lucky ones," she said. "See, eight has turned up twice already."

She was not startled by his speaking to her ; she was glad. Last night it seemed every one had spoken to every one in the baccarat room ; and this Monsieur Diderot was to her, at least, the hero of the occasion. She was glad, almost proud, that he spoke to her.

"Well, I will follow you."

He threw down a franc on the number she had chosen, and together they watched, she with excitement, he with growing admiration of her whilst the painted iron horses, with their jockeys, first raced, and then crawled, and finally jerked their way round the machine.

"It is—Yes ! I am sure—what do you think of it ?—an eight again ! That is three times ! ! Oh ! we have won. I am so glad ; I'm so glad you followed my luck."

She was really charming in her excitement, and the way she turned to him for sympathy. The Belgian—Monsieur Diderot was a Belgian—said to himself that if he had been the Baron d'Avril he would not have left Cabourg, no, not even at the call of any numbers of Madame la Baronne !

He offered Julie his stake. He said it really belonged to her, he had only put it on for her. But, of course, she replied that it was absurd. She blushed and dimpled, and refused with animation, and a little gesticulation. He spoke English to her; he was proud of his English, and from one topic they passed to another moving gradually away from the tables, as he persuaded her it was unwise to tempt fortune for yet a fourth time. For his part, he thought it was the turn of one of the earlier numbers. When from the distance they heard the croupier call "*Deux*," she was quite astonished at his cleverness, and wished she had taken advantage of it.

"Madame had great good fortune also at baccarat last night? It is surprising Madame is so lucky at cards!"

The implication, the compliment, escaped her.

"It was the first time I had played," she answered a little shyly, but eagerly too. She wanted to talk about it. Julie always wanted to talk.

"You must go on! That is the way to play, always go on, when one is in the vein. But you must not break the bank!"

He smiled at her. He was a thin man, small, dark-skinned, with waxed moustache, and a little pointed beard between his under lip and chin; the finger and thumb of his right hand were yellow, stained from the cigarettes he rolled up, and

smoked constantly. When he smiled, she saw his teeth were stained too, not white. But she wanted so much to talk !

"You must not break the bank," he said again.

"*Avez-vous perdu ?* I am sorry you lost," she answered quickly, in her impulsive way. "I thought it was so good of you to sit there all the time, dealing for us. It must have made you very tired ; I am sorry if you lost, too. I did not know if that was all your money that the croupier had in front of him. I wondered why you said always '*Payez.*'"

She looked at him sympathetically, with soft eyes.

"Did you play long after I left ?"

She was glad to detain him, and talk about baccarat.

"Yes ! Very long ; they did not want me to get up. I played until three !"

"Ah ; but that was a long time. And you lost all the time ?"

"Yes, all the time. But it is of no consequence."

"I should not like to win always."

"No ? But Madame will always be winning !"

Her blushes came so readily.

"But it must make one feel uncomfortable to win always !" she persisted. She ignored the compliment.

"*Vous pouvez risquer cela, Madame,*" he said again.

He held the leather doors open for her. She had not meant to play baccarat again this afternoon. She hung back a little ; but, as he waited expectantly, she passed through with him, for it was dull alone.

"Perhaps I have forgotten how to play. Yesterday the Baron d'Avril was helping me ; but to-day I have not seen him," she said, perhaps a trifle coquettishly.

"You have known Monsieur le Baron a long time ?"

Monsieur Diderot was quite anxious for the answer. Julie puzzled him a little ; she presented a type that was new to him, with her French piquancy, her English shyness, her readiness to talk, her unreadiness at compliments. He also knew that the Baron d'Avril was not a man of gallantry ; it was part of Monsieur Diderot's method to know everything about the frequenters of gambling-rooms. Julie explained immediately her short accidental acquaintance with the Baron, her drive with the Bertrands, and that the Bertrands had known her father.

Of course Monsieur Diderot had also known the Baron. He was quite startled to hear that this was his daughter ! Of all the people who had claimed acquaintance with that dead gambler, it was indeed Monsieur Diderot who could do so

with most truth. All through the last days of her father's fight with chance, at Boulogne, and, later on, at Aix, Léon Diderot had watched him, noted his decadence, been responsible, in fact, for that very incident, now recalled perhaps with some compunction, which had closed both Casinos to the Baron, and driven the poor old ruined gamester to Southampton and the good offices of John Courtney.

So this was Jules Courvoisier's daughter ! To think of that old *rastaquère* with a daughter like this ! His interest in her was accentuated, not diminished by the knowledge. Dreams, for even Léon Diderot could dream, became tangible when he looked upon the daughter of the Baron de Courvoisier, and thought of that salon, or club, which he would open one day in Paris, where all the *joueurs* from England and from Italy, as well as from Belgium, would come to play. A central figure, with just Julie's grace and beauty and bloom, should preside over the establishment, and add her attractions to that of the green cloth.

Pouf ! and the dream was gone.

They were in the *cercle*. And here were all the faces of yesterday, eager for his coming, tired of the small banks, the petty stakes, the tedious *chemin de fer*. Quite a little murmur greeted his appearance.

"They want to play high ! *Hein !*" he said to Julie, smiling that hard smile that was with the

lips only. "And you, you will sit by my side, and bring me your luck, perhaps?"

"Oh! *oui, je l'espère*. You must not lose again to-day. How will you make them know that you will do what they want?"

It was not difficult. The *croupier*, sitting idly at the table, waiting to see if they would have a *chemin de fer*, caught Monsieur Diderot's eye. What he signalled, or said, was imperceptible to Julie. But every chair seemed to fill at once, and behind every chair already there were people.

"*Dix mille francs en banque. Une fois, deux fois, la banque est adjugée a dix mille francs!*"

Her companion had taken again his seat of last night, but he did not forget to place Julie at his side, to order "*un petit banc pour Madame*," to call for the *changeur*, and see that she had counters with which to stake. Léon Diderot could play two games at once, more, if necessary. As for Julie, all her outlook had been provincialised and dulled in the years of her marriage, but heredity is stronger than circumstance. And here soon, extraordinarily soon, she found herself at home.

A courtesan at the back of her began to play a *système*; a man at the other side explained its simplicity to Julie.

"*Puis-je avoir une carte semblable?*" she asked.

"Why, certainly."

He was a nomad, who had travelled in America.

He asked for a card for her, spaced it out, and lent her his pencil. It was even more interesting to play baccarat when one had a pencil and a card, and made dots, now in twos and now in threes, and drew lines, and found that there were times when you must push double, and even treble stakes over the line, times when you must not even put one. But at those times she would put a white counter ; for it seemed a pity to do nothing. And if it came a nine or an eight to the table when she had put on that unlicensed white counter, she exclaimed that she had been right. For it was absurd of one when playing baccarat not to stake at all !

At first the nomad tried argument ; but in the end he admired her complexion, and fathomed her intelligence. Then he played his own game, and let her play hers without comment.

Dives-Cabourg is not like Monte Carlo, or even Ostend. Everything there is on a small, a limited, scale. The players, meeting every day, twice a day, for a whole month (it is a short-season place, and August its only harvest), are as a little family party. Everybody knows everybody and is interested in the others' fortunes. Julie was pointed out as the lady who held the cards last evening, when there was a pass of eleven against the bank !

When the croupier shovelled the cards over to her this afternoon, the "*à Madame la main*" was

followed by every one increasing his or her stake. She felt quite proud when she noticed it, and was anxious to justify their faith in her, for their sakes, more than for her own.

At first she was again fortunate. But the big run of this afternoon was against the punters. Julie, with her newly learned system to guide her, kept on doubling and re-doubling her stake. At first, too, she was almost pleased when "*ce pauvre Monsieur Diderot*" had a little luck, for she realised, now, that whatever the croupier shovelled in was for him. But "*à la banque*," "*huit à la banque*," "*neuf à la banque*," even with her sympathy for Monsieur Diderot, began to fall on her ears with an unpleasant sound, as her first five louis were swept away, and then another five, and very quickly all that she had gained the previous evening.

When she had nothing left in her purse, she hesitated, and was about to get up. But Monsieur Diderot, who had eyes apparently on both sides of his head, paused in his quiet dealing to ask her why she should leave so soon? When she explained, somewhat shyly, that she had no more money with her, he told her that did not matter. He begged her to remain where she was until the "*fin de la taille*." She was glad to remain. She thought he was very kind to regard her.

When the cards were being reshuffled, Diderot called the *chef des jeux*, and gave him a word of instruction. Then some one at the back of her

asked Julie, in her ear, how much he should bring her? Shortly, and always quietly, Monsieur Diderot explained to her, whilst he waited for the cards, that she could have whatever she wanted from the *Caisse*. She could pay it that evening, or to-morrow; it was wrong to leave off playing just now, without giving herself a chance of recouping her losses, Monsieur Diderot said to her:

"You will win it all back, if there is a pass against the bank."

And, sure enough, the bank lost steadily for five successive deals.

When they left off that afternoon she was able to reimburse the *Caisse*, she had even recovered something of her earlier losses.

There was fine soil for the virus of gaming in Julie's veins, although it was not all at once that the worst of the fever showed itself. She would have left off playing, perhaps, after the fright she had had that afternoon, when she had lost all she had with her, and had been induced to borrow from the *Caisse*. She told Monsieur Diderot, as he walked back with her to the hotel, that she should play no more, and he did not combat her decision.

After dinner, however, he met her, by chance, on her way to her own room, and asked her, since she had decided not to play again that evening, whether she would not take a turn with him on the front? It had been a hot day, but now the air

was beautiful, surely it was too early for her to retire, she would not be able to sleep ! She hesitated. But indeed, it would be absurd to go to bed at nine o'clock in the evening, when you were taking a holiday, after nine years, in your own country. M. Diderot had been kind to her this afternoon, and it was through him she had won back all her money. He had lost his own, poor man ! And he, too, was alone in Cabourg ; he told her so when she hesitated.

She bade him wait whilst she fetched a wrap ; it is possible that she told Marie not to sit up for her, as she could not be sure what time she would come in from her walk ! She was quite femininely disingenuous with herself ! It was not that Monsieur Diderot attracted her, but the adventure did. She ran down quite quickly to join him.

There were hundreds of people walking, up and down, in front of the brilliantly lighted hotels, so many that they jostled against Monsieur Diderot and Julie. A band of Neapolitan singers was entertaining the crowd, and making the throng so great in just that one place. It was unpleasant to be so surrounded.

They walked on a little, away from the lights and the people, to where, almost alone, they leaned against the low stone parapet, and saw the sea and wet sand glisten in the moonlight. Vaguely now from the distance the soft summer

wind wafted to them the dim tinkle of the mandolines.

Léon Diderot could not talk sentiment, perhaps if he had talked sentiment she would have thought of her John. But even Diderot could feel something of the charm of their comparative isolation. He had not had many *tête-à-têtes* with ladies. His tepid blood warmed a little, and, characteristically, he began to talk of baccarat. He told Julie stories of banks that had been broken, *coups* that had been made, extraordinary runs that had occurred.

The moon and the sea and wet sands attuned him to romance, and it was the romance of gaming that he gave her. She drank it in ; that little fever, already begun, was acute enough, even now, to make her thirsty. Why should it not be that she had indeed the lucky hand ? Her father had been always unfortunate, Monsieur Diderot had told her, and she had heard that too from Monsieur Bertrand and his lady, but it might be that she would win back all he had lost. John had taken her without *dot*. But her *dot* was here, at the gaming tables ! There it was her father had left it, it was from there she would gain it back, for John, and for their children.

Something of this she conveyed to Léon Diderot ; not much about John or the children, but about her feeling that she would gain back all her father had lost. He said it was possible, more than possible. He owned he had thought

it a great pity when she told him she would play no more, for if he were any judge, she was just one of the few who had a natural instinct for it. Of course, there were chances for and against winning. It was courage that was needed, always courage; so that when *the* moment came, the inevitable moment of luck, the gambler should stake everything, without hesitation or fear, seizing with both hands the golden opportunity.

It appeared to Monsieur Diderot that Julie had just the sort of courage needed.

Much more of the same kind did he tell Julie as they found their way back to the Casino, much more to which she listened with deep interest. It was all so new; and yet it seemed all so familiar.

The music had ceased, the crowd on the esplanade had dispersed. Only outside the doors of the *cercle* stood a little string of *fiacres* and automobiles, telling that the gamblers had assembled, or were assembling, waiting for the leviathan who would make a large bank for them. They made room for him as, with Julie still by his side, he passed through the doors, from the quiet of the moon to the glare of the lamps, and the heat, and the green-marked table.

This evening again the bank won; but Julie borrowed from the *Caisse* with smaller misgiving. Her heart fell a little when the twenty-five louis melted away so quickly. The second twenty-five,

although she husbanded them, and played more carefully, and gradually diminished her stakes, were half gone before the play ended. Long before that moment Julie had become completely inoculated. Not even her father could have been more eager than she, counting and staking, and waiting for a pass. All the sparkling of her pretty eyes, all the smiling of her pretty mouth, even the dimples, seemed changed and hardened by her absorption. Her fluctuating fortunes made the hours short in that crowded room, which was close and hot with the panting breath of greed, its air was infectious, breathed again and again, it was poisonous. Julie had red spots on either cheek, the small hands changed their form, now they only knew how to hold, to clutch, and to swoop. The hours seemed to fly.

It was past two when she got to bed that night, to lie awake with beating heart and confused brain, trying to discover how it was that the system she had learnt had failed, to recall where it was that she had made mistakes, calculating again and again how much she had lost, how she could arrange to pay the amount, and still have sufficient for her hotel bill, resolving desperately that if tomorrow she could only get her money back, only leave off as she had begun, she would never, never play again.

She had begun to hate Monsieur Diderot. She wished he had not spoken to her in the Casino.

She wished she had not walked with him on the esplanade. He had made her play, he had won all her money. His sallow face and black eyes rose before her in the darkness. Yes, she felt, she knew, she hated him. She would not speak to him again.

But she could not go into the rooms alone, and she *must* make one more effort to recoup herself ; for all her money was gone. It was John's money ; it was left with her, so that she might pay her bill. She must, she *must* get John's money back.

Monsieur Diderot knew the secret of how to win ; all those stories he had told her were of people who won fortunes. In a few hours she would see him. After all, it was necessary that she should speak to him again. She would make him tell her, she had not asked him questions enough, as to what they had done, on what systems they had played, those people who had made fortunes. Her head ached, and she could not sleep, and always she heard the voices of the croupiers, "*Huit à la banque, la banque gagne. Faites vos jeux. Neuf à la banque.*" And always she saw before her fevered eyes the threes and fours of the punters, the eights and the nines of the bank. They grew dimmer, and more confused, phantasmagoria that came and went as she drifted into uneasy slumber.

She was suddenly aroused by real voices. Through the thin partition she heard them dis-

tinctly, words and movement and laughter. Presently she tingled and blushed all by herself in the darkness, and shut her ears, and shrank under the bedclothes ; and tried to pretend she had not heard.

This Grand Hôtel de Cabourg with its thin walls was no place for John Courtney's wife, who was still a young woman and alone here. She was alone but for the children, who went to bed so early, and were not sufficient companions for her. John blamed himself bitterly, later, when he knew everything, when he understood what he had done. Julie had heard nothing, seen nothing. Since she had been grown up, all the world of weakness and temptation, of wickedness and unclean things, had been hidden from her. But at Dives-Cabourg they were all around, for every one to see.

She changed her room in the morning, the airy front room that John had selected for her. The manager of this French seaside hotel did not quite understand her confused explanation, did not quite realise of what she was complaining. Madame played baccarat, sat up in the rooms until two in the morning, and Madame wanted to change her room because she heard people talking, because she could not go to sleep ! She got red when she was trying to tell him, but she told him nothing except that she had heard voices, and that she wanted to change her rooms. He shrugged his shoulders, he did not understand. But of course

he wished to please all his clients ; it was easy to find her different quarters.

She won largely the day she changed her room ; won all she had lost and more besides, and could have kept her vows, the promises she had made to herself.

But, if the change of room had brought her luck, how stupid, she thought, how wrong, not to take advantage of it !

Monsieur Diderot became less uncongenial to her, even necessary as a companion, when, in the morning on the *plage*, in the evenings on the esplanade, going to and from the rooms, he encouraged or condoled with her, talked of her good or ill-fortune, counselled her always with the counsel she wished to hear.

CHAPTER V

By the time the Baron d'Avril returned to Cabourg, free, as far as Madame la Baronne was concerned, to pursue his good fortune, either with the little *Anglaise*, as they still persisted in calling her, or at the green cloth, Julie Courtney had become a confirmed gambler. She always vowed she would never play again, if once she recouped herself, if once the money John had given her was safe. She always thought, when she was winning, that it was a pity to leave off when the luck had turned, that now Génie's *dot* was coming to her, besides all of her patrimony which her father had lost. She was different in no one way from any other incurable with the same disease.

Instead of the simple life she had led when she first came to Cabourg; the early *café* with the children, the long morning with them on the sands, bathing as the tide served, helping to build sand castles, chattering to them over her needle-work; she rose late, after her fevered nights, came down only in time for the twelve o'clock *déjeuner*,

slept in the early afternoon, and watched the clock impatiently until she could play again.

By the time the Baron d'Avril returned to Cabourg, she seemed one with the advertisement agents, and painted ladies, the Barons, the simple Messieurs with red ribbons, and red rosettes, and red and white buttons, whose unanimous idea of a seaside holiday was to sit in an over-crowded, badly-ventilated room, making calculations on little pieces of paper, staking their louis or five-louis pieces against the irresistible bank.

For it was a fact that the bank had become irresistible.

It was no wonder that Julie had now no pretty coquetties or smiles for the Baron d'Avril. She had lost all the money she had won, all the money she had brought with her, all the money John had given her for the hotel bill, and she owed a thousand francs at the *Caisse*! If it had not been for the encouragement, for the kindness, for the unremitting attentions of Monsieur Diderot she would have been hopeless, distracted! But always he had an argument, a suggestion, that brought back hope.

All the time that Julie did not spend at the tables was spent in his company. The Baron did not find that his interest in her survived very vividly when he took his seat at the table on the Saturday afternoon of his return. Some one had chaffed him at having been "cut out," and, of

course, that had annoyed him. Being a Frenchman, he had not explained that he had had nothing from Julie of which he could be deprived. But his *amour propre* resented that she no longer responded to his glances. He was ready to believe everything he heard. She had accepted the attentions of the Belgian, she did not command his respect.

Something of her beauty was gone, it seemed. She was haggard from want of sleep, the tints of her complexion had yellowed a little. The fever had grown acute, her restless fingers played constantly with the counters, her eager eyes followed the cards. It had become etiquette to leave to her the seat at the right hand of the banker. She spoke to him now and again as she exclaimed against the luck.

The bank had become irresistible.

The Baron heard all around him stories of phenomenal runs, stories of the amounts the bank had won, stories of colossal losses. The sums mentioned, appalling for Cabourg, where respectable Parisian *bourgeois* had hitherto ventured only their hundred francs or so, were not so large in the ears of the Baron d'Avril, who was accustomed to play at Trouville and Monte Carlo. Only their persistency made them remarkable. It seemed that no one had won! The two thousand francs that the Baron d'Avril had taken away with him a week ago was the only amount, it

appeared, that could be traced against the bank.

Of course, there was, and had been, grumbling, whispered comments, doubts. And always there was a crowd around the table, punting now in louis, now in notes of a hundred, five hundred, a thousand francs, amid murmurs and muttered exclamations.

On the afternoon of the Baron's return, however, there came a change. There were more people than ever in the rooms, for rumours of high play had brought in visitors from Beuzeville, and Villers, from Dives, and even from Caen and Honfleur. There had been racing at Deauville earlier in the week, and on the following day the "*Grand Prix de Trouville*" was to be run. Every room in the hotel was full.

Léon Diderot had strongly urged Julie to make a bold bid for fortune that afternoon, to go for a coup. The Baron d'Avril, who watched her in the intervals of his own game, notwithstanding his abated interest in her, saw that her cheeks were flushed, and that she was playing recklessly. Also that the banker once said a quiet word to her, to which she replied impatiently.

There was money to be won that afternoon. It was not a thousand-francs crowd that was thronging the tables, but small punters were there, who staked their louis and left them on, and withdrew after a pass of three, and were altogether careful

and experienced. The bank lost steadily. The Baron Ad'vril added to his winnings, was good-humoured, and even made little jokes across the table. Only Julie, by some persistent misfortune, staking at the wrong time, diminishing the number of counters when she should have increased them, playing for the coup inopportunately, had not succeeded in benefiting by the bank's losses.

In truth, poor Julie had lost her courage.

Her gathering difficulties and growing unhappiness were complicated by the correspondence with John. She had, unfortunately, written him very fully about her first evening's experiment under the guidance of the Baron d'Avril. He had replied immediately and peremptorily, desiring her not to play again, nor to go into the rooms. He did not remind her of her father's career, he loved her too much for that, but he told her he absolutely disapproved of her playing cards at a public table, and that she must never do so again. But three or four days had intervened between her letter and his reply to it, and in those three or four days, as we know, she had lost all her money, she was already in debt, and her mode of life at Cabourg had become habitual. The fever had sapped her morality; she was no longer the good obedient wife, the confiding Julie, of her first letter.

If she could get her money back, she would not play again. Then he would not know, he

need never know ; that she had disobeyed him ; this was what she thought when she read what John had written. She would not distress him by telling him ; that was how she solaced her conscience. There was no further mention of baccarat in her letter, and John, who was not suspicious by nature, not a gambler, and was forgetful or oblivious of French seaside custom, was satisfied with the short account he got of *fêtes* on the sands, and children's dances in the Casino, and fireworks in the evenings.

Her disingenuousness reacted on her character, and made her always more and more reckless. Always, she told herself, she would not play after to-day. But the day when she did not play had not yet come ! And now the sixty pounds John had given her for the three weeks' bills were all gone, and she had had forty pounds from the *Caisse*, and that very morning she had heard from John that, as Mr. Jarvis was going away on Sunday, he would take the night boat for Havre, and on Monday afternoon, or evening at latest, he would be with her in Cabourg !

No wonder she looked drawn, haggard, and unhappy, and had no smiles nor pretty coquetties with which to greet the return of the Baron.

A certain measure of reticence, a certain guard, Monsieur Diderot had put upon himself. This was for him the very woman to preside over that establishment which already the season in Cabourg

was making possible. It was true he was playing for the association, and that Monsieur Bertrand and the management had their interest in the play. But it had been a good season so far, and with so many people in Cabourg it promised to finish even better. The pretty little woman would have to learn to play with discretion, and she must avoid the late hours that spoilt her complexion, the excitement that shook her nerves. It was the Aphrodite of the morning bathe he wanted for his rooms, which the Cabourg season, and perhaps a good finish in September at Ostend, would make possible that winter in Paris.

He knew a little of her position. It was made clearer to him presently.

"Ne dinez pas seule ce soir," he said to Julie, when they were out of the rooms.

They always went the longest way back to the hotel, into the air and round by the sea front, instead of through the Casino.

"Do me the honour, for once, of joining my table. We will talk over things together. You ought to have won this afternoon, we must see what we can manage for this evening ; you must try a new system."

Almost a sob escaped her.

"Mon mari vient lundi, je ne sais ce que je ferai !"

He was sorry it must be so soon. Of course the season at Cabourg would not last long, but he had counted on another week.

"Oh, well, there is to-night, and twice to-morrow, and who knows what will happen?"

"*Mais—mais——*"

Of course he knew she had no money with her and that she had borrowed as much as she could from the *Caisse*. At his suggestion a hint had been given her that the *Caisse* balanced its books at the end of the week.

"I haven't enough with me to—to play up properly. It is horrible to be cramped for capital. If it had not been for that, this afternoon, I should have won; I know I should have won."

He commiserated with her, he was thoroughly sympathetic. He said he had thought of a way out; he would tell her at dinner. They only parted at the door of her room, his own was along the same corridor.

Her toilette, that night again, suited her admirably. It was red, and the large hat formed a background against which her brown eyes and black hair took depth and picturesqueness. It threw colour into the pale olive of her skin, and accentuated the soft crimson of her lips. Her English flush had vanished, but the reds in her hat reflected an artificial bloom.

Léon Diderot, seated opposite to her, at the narrow table by the window that overlooked the sea, had once more that expression of satisfied connoisseurship. The charming figure was hardly revealed through the transparent lace of her high

corsage. But he had seen its perfection that morning, again, in her wet bathing dress. He was not quite so careful, quite so self-restrained, as usual. It was the first meal they had had together. He persuaded her to drink champagne, and the wine brought more colour into her cheeks. The Baron d'Avril might think she had gone off, but, to Monsieur Diderot, with a certain gleam in his hard eyes, and a moistening of his lips, finding himself less calm than usual, she seemed wholly desirable and attractive.

At first she was nervous and ill at ease ; she was not sure she ought to have dined with him. She looked constantly round to see if people were noticing them, her conversation was constrained.

But the tables next them were filled by family parties ; the Cabourg visitors are polyglot. There were some Spaniards with their children in bright-coloured clothes, swarthy and torpid ; there were four Germans, talking at the top of their voices, disputing with the waiters over pfennigs, discussing dishes ; and there was an American jockey with a heavily scented *cocotte*. Nobody was observing Julie or her companion. And gradually, as the unaccustomed wine ran through her veins, she became, externally at least, the Julie of a fortnight ago, all pretty shyness and gesticulation, with innocent coquettish speech.

Diderot filled her glass again and again, he saw that she dined well, he met her easier mood.

Presently they began to talk more and more freely. Her husband was coming on Monday ! Then, even if she had won all her money back, if she need never tell him how she had spent her time, it would be, perhaps, a little *monotone*. It would be *triste* in Cabourg, if at five o'clock every day she should *faire une promenade* with John ; if every evening at half-past nine, when the tables were crowded and all the excitement and the play were going on, she and John should sit together in their room, or walk a little on the sea front, and at ten go quietly to bed !

It was at Diderot's instigation that all this, which she had anticipated with such pleasure, appeared suddenly dull and *banale*, and monotonous.

Madame was not born for that humdrum, *stupide* English life. Madame should be where there were always gaiety and life, people coming and going, music, and fine toilettes ! And Madame ought to wear jewellery, she ought to have a string of pearls like Madame la Comtesse de Dossy, or rubies, rubies the colour, so exquisite, of Madame's lips ! They did not pay compliments to married women in Southampton ; and certainly no one before had made love to the wife of John Courtney, or told her that she was wasted on a phlegmatic English husband, that she was born for a life of gaiety, being so beautiful and charming. Everything, she was now told, that wealth

could give, should be hers. She ought to reign, her beauty entitled her to be queen of a salon. It made her uncomfortable, this talk, for of course there was no one but John whose admiration she wanted. But to-night, to-night, what was she to gamble with to-night? She must get John's money back.

Perhaps as the unaccustomed champagne flowed, did Julie begin to see more vividly than her duty, or her children, or her John, the dazzle of the picture Diderot was drawing for her, the life all pleasure, where one only dressed and played, and listened to music, where the sky was always blue and the air was always clear, and a pretty woman—she had almost forgotten she was pretty, except when John or her children saw her in a new dress—had the homage and the tributes of all men. In that gay world of which he told her, at places of which she had not even heard, she might play and play and play, and never remember that she had lost the money John had given her for her hotel bill, and was in debt. . . .

The dinner was not long, although they sat and sat, until the Germans, still disputing, had clamped their noisy way out of the *salle à manger*; until the Spaniards, with sleepy courtesy, had bade their dignified "good evening" to the obsequious *maitre d'hotel*; until even the band had departed, and through gaps of empty tables one saw the perspiring waiters standing about to cool themselves.

Léon Diderot had made up his mind. Her husband was coming on Monday, and she had lost all the money he had given her for her hotel bills. Nothing had been paid ! Moreover, she owed the *Caisse* nearly two thousand francs, and she had in her purse but three louis with which to win back all her losses, only three louis with which to play to-night, to-morrow, and again in the evening. Of course she was distracted, of course she could not sleep at night, of course she had looked this afternoon tired and haggard and unhappy. But, dining in company, and talking, and the wine, had done her good. He made her take a *Benedictine* with her coffee. Gradually she had confided everything to him, everything that he had guessed so well before. It was the nature of this poor Julie to be emotional, carried away by the moment, to live in each little hour, the little hours that should have been all sunshine.

Léon told her, after they had had their coffee, when they stood for a few moments on the steps of the hotel, that she must not trouble about anything. He would not see her troubled. She should not borrow of the *Caisse*, not go into the rooms without capital to play with. He would go upstairs with her, and bring her, to her room, a thousand francs. With that, she could play all the evening, she could give herself the chance of winning. To-morrow ? Well, to-morrow must

take care of itself ! *A chaque jour suffit sa peine.* She might win a fortune with a thousand francs, he had seen it done with five !

Presently they went upstairs together, their rooms being on the same corridor. He told her that whilst she was putting on her gloves and adjusting her veil, he would get the money for her.

Before she had done more than open her wardrobe, before she had sought her hat, her veil, her evening wrap, she heard his knock at the door.

She was imprudent, but she did not realise she was being imprudent. He had always been respectful, and she had not found him less so during dinner to-night. And how could she play without money ? When she had asked for more at the *Caisse* this afternoon they had hesitated, and made her blush furiously, and feel ashamed.

She went to the door.

He was standing outside, but the corridor was dark. He had a pocket-book in his hand, he fumbled at the contents.

"I have brought you the notes, but I cannot see . . ."

The quick "come in" was said without intention. He was in the room before she realised it. He closed the door behind him, but his manner was just the same, not familiar at all, very quiet. If her heart was beating quickly, and the flush was

coming and going in her cheeks, it was the wine she had drunk, she knew it was the wine she had drunk, that made all her pulses suddenly throb.

Notwithstanding that Monsieur Diderot still examined his pocket-book for the notes, he saw the distracting disorder of his lady's room. The pink *peignoir* hanging in the open wardrobe, with its silks and laces, the turned-down bed, the dainty nightgown laid out, the blue small slippers on the floor, the dressing-table with its silver brushes and mirrors. And over everything was that impalpable feminine perfume, made up of scent sachets and powder and water softeners, aromatic, dainty and intoxicating.

His hands, those deft, and slender fingered, croupier's hands of his, trembled a little as he counted out to her the thin soft foreign notes.

"*Un, deux, trois,*" he counted up to ten. Then his eyes met hers. If she had not smiled, because she was nervous, with lips rather tremulous, with a little trick of uplifted eyebrow, with the brown eyes half frightened, half amused, if she had not, in fact, been Julie, *un peu coquette au fond*, and wanting to thank Monsieur Diderot, though her words came not easily, he might not have dared. But as it was . . .

Well! that one, that little, kiss he took could hurt no one. Julie was shocked, but she could not resent it, she could push him away, and hear her own heart beating, and be scarlet and angry and

nearly crying. But she could not play without his notes ; they were still in his hand.

And he apologised profusely. "Madame was so adorable, and in her own room—he was only a man ! He was a thousand times regretful. See ! he knelt, he kissed her hand, he implored her pardon."

She would not have said she forgave him if she had not wanted to get rid of him, wanted him to go from her room. It was absurd of him to be on his knees—he must get up, *vite, vite !* he must go. Marie might be coming in, the chambermaid might knock. She was adorably shy and distressed, and yet, he thought, not cold.

When he had risen again to his feet, when he gave her the notes, he grew bolder.

Ah ! but Madame would not send him away at once, that moment ? She could not be so cruel !

She did not want to kiss him, although her heart was beating so fast, and her cheeks were so flushed, and she was grateful to him for the money, for the means to play again. The scene, the little drama of his kneeling, of his imploring, amid the disorder of the room, was all one with the wine and the excitement. And perhaps Julie found something not unpleasant in the excitement, whilst the wine was still warm in her veins.. When, this time with more deliberation, more lingeringly, his arms were about her, and his lips found hers, she grew suddenly quiescent, following the thrill, the sudden

heat, the emotion that was so new to her. How strange of him to kiss her like that, how wrong. She had been married to an Englishman. Léon found the way to surprise her. . . .

That the *valet de chambre* forgot to knock, that he came into the room as he always came at this time in the evening, to tidy it, after Madame had gone downstairs, was a thousand times unfortunate. It was worse than unfortunate, it was terrible, that the Baron d'Avril happened to be passing through the corridor at the moment the door opened. Her own confusion, and Léon Diderot's self-possession, were equally abominable. Léon's shrug, his regrets, his *douceur* to the valet when he made his smiling, compromising explanation, were all separate outrages.

She remained alone in her room a little while when he had gone out, trying to recover herself, her calm, her reasoning power. She had done no harm, why, then, should she be so agitated, so excited ?

It is not necessary to dwell upon the events of that evening, and of the play ; it were cruel to dwell upon them. She could not stay alone in her room, it was full of that new experience, of the open door, and the face of the Baron d'Avril, of the expression of the *valet de chambre*, of . . . of her own thoughts.

She would go down, she would play just that once more. To-night she was sure she would

win. Then she would give Monsieur Diderot back his thousand francs, and she would pay the *Caisse*, and perhaps, perhaps, there would be John's money, too. She would never play again. To-morrow she would go to church with her children, to the Protestant church at Beuzeville. On Monday John would be here! He would like to hear she had been at the Protestant church with the children.

In the gambling room, the Baron's ironical greeting, the smiles she saw, or imagined, on the faces of the women, the curiosity or interest in Monsieur Bertrand's glances, as he gossiped with the Baron, and anon looked in her direction, rasped her quivering nerves, and made it impossible for her to concentrate her mind on the play. She was ashamed, yes, it was shame that sent quiver after quiver through her, that made her hide her downcast eyes, and feel that every one in all that room was looking at her, was staring at her, was seeing Léon Diderot as he had stood up with her in her room, and given her that strange kiss.

He had kept her usual place for her beside him. In some quiet way, almost without speech, he conveyed his sympathy, his understanding. Her footstool was there, her card and pencil were there; there was a little pile of counters in front of her.

"*C'est une intermittence,*" he said, "I told the

changeur you would want counters ready. We have played only one round."

With fingers that trembled she tried to take up the thread of the game, to mark her card, and stake her louis.

This was the last, the very last time she would ever play ! On Monday John would be here, she would make him take her away from this horrible Cabourg, these men that smiled and shrugged, these women that stared, back to dear Southampton, her little house, her quiet friends, her life so still and orderly.

But if she could get back all her money, if she could pay back the *Caisse*, and Monsieur Diderot, and everybody, how much easier it would be to meet John, to tell him everything, to be as she had been ten days ago. Ten days ! it was a cycle, an age !

She was winning, not largely, but winning nevertheless. Her louis came back to her again and again. It was an *intermittence*, well marked. She had learnt a little of the game, and now took only alternate chances. Soon, very soon, she forgot everything and everybody, in the absorption of her calculations. It was really a remarkable series, just such a run that fell in with the system she had acquired. Her pile of counters grew steadily larger and larger. It seemed a pity to play in louis when the game was so set, so certain. She began to punt in notes. In four deals she

had won *cinq cent francs* ! Her heart beat high, her hopefulness returned. She had no memory, or thought, of anything but the cards. How soon it was the end of the *taille* ! How slowly the croupier shuffled ! She could hardly restrain herself from crying out, "*Cela est assez, surement c'est assez !*" as the six new packs were opened, and shuffled, and reshuffled.

At last it was done, the red card was handed to her politely for the cut. Her fingers trembled as she inserted it. Now they were all stacked before Monsieur Diderot, he had patted them down into easy position for him, and the new deal began.

But the *intermittence*, the regularity, all that had made the "system" play so well, were at an end ! Two wins for the punt, one for the bank, three for the punt, seven for the bank ! Who could play such a series ? And she was playing in notes, going for a *coup*.

But the *coup* !—the *coup* eluded her. Again and again she tried for it, and doubled, and lost again, and then won, and increased the stake ; and saw the whole swept away ! The system was absurd, infamous. She discarded it, and decided to play by inspiration. It came to her that Monsieur Diderot had told her gambling was an inspiration ! But, unfortunately, her inspiration was as faulty as the system. Whenever she increased her stake, that was the time "*Neuf à la banque*" or "*Huit à la banque*" was called in that madden-

ingly monotonous way by the croupier. What an atrocious accent he had too, the man could not be a Frenchman at all ! If, for once, she did not stake, or staked little, whether it was a six or a five at which the player stopped, it did not matter, the bank was *baccarat*, and Léon Diderot's quiet "*Payez*" brought her back only a miserable counter or so.

She lost her self-control. Recklessly now she shoved her money over the line. The bank won and lost, but always Julie lost ; or so it seemed to her. There was a run of three for the table, of seven for the bank, it was again :

"*Dernier coup. Il y a six cartes à la coupe. Qui ponte accepte,*" sang out the croupier, in his monotonous chant. In a half mad moment she put all that was in front of her over the line . . . there was a sickening moment of suspense. "*A la banque, huit à la banque, la banque gagne.*"

It was all over.

She staggered up from her chair, it grated on the floor as she pushed it away, and everybody looked up. "*Madame a de la guigne,*" said the *changeur* sympathetically. Already some one had slipped into the place she had left vacant. But there was a pause in the play ; she had not heard what Monsieur had said, but there was another sound of the scraping of a chair on the wooden floor.

"*La banque est aux enchères. Qui veut la*

banque. Cinq louis à la banque, dix louis à la banque, quinze louis à la banque. Une fois, deux fois. La banque est adjugée à quinze louis."

The high play was over, at least for the moment. Monsieur Diderot had had enough, he was tired of it, he relinquished his seat.

Julie was not quite steady on her feet, the lamps seemed to be swaying and growing dim. She was glad to find Diderot by her side. The gambling room had grown fuller and fuller as the evening had worn on, and first the audience from the theatre, and then the dancers from the Casino, had joined their parties in the *cercle*. She had to thread her way through the crowd. There were many to note her going. But only those few who were seated at the table, who had, as it were, watched the drama from its inception, shrugged their shoulders, or smiled their knowing smiles, when the banker followed her from the room.

To the many visitors at Dives-Cabourg, intrigue and easy commerce were familiar sights. They knew nothing of John, or the children; to them there was nothing tragic in the situation.

She was not feeling well, it was the moment of reaction from the excitement, from the champagne, from the play. As soon as she was in the air her faintness wore off, but she grew hysterical, she cried. When she found herself on one of the seats overlooking the sea, she was glad of the support of an encircling arm. When she

recovered herself a little, she asked Diderot **why** he had left off playing. She thanked him for his attentions, and said she was "all right now," he must go back.

"I have had enough. I am tired of it for to-night, and you, too, you are over-tired. **They** keep the rooms too hot, too close, and all those people in there to-night made the atmosphere impossible. When you are better, well enough to move, I suggest a little supper together, a sandwich, a glass of wine, otherwise you will not sleep. *Pouf!* One was asphyxiated in there; my mouth is quite dry."

When she had further recovered, when her head grew clearer, and she saw the moon, and the dark heave of the waves, she could not put away thought. Maddeningly it pressed upon her, she felt sick with it, sick as when she was in that awful steamer. How happy she was then, when she thought she was so miserable, and how good John had been, how tender!

She had gambled, gambled away all her money, and his, and the children's. How could she ever face him? And before her was the dreadful night, when she would lie awake and think of everything, and the darkness would be full of vague terrors, and she would hear voices, and the creaking of doors, and there would be nothing for her but thought, awful thought and wakefulness!

Of course she was glad to put off the commence-



The sandwiches were dry and tasteless, but the champagne was cold and sparkling and welcome to her parched tongue

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ment of that miserable night she foresaw. She went with him to the *salle a manger*. The sandwiches were dry and tasteless, but the champagne was cold and sparkling, and welcome to her parched tongue. Why had she been afraid of it ? Now she drank and drank again ; she was extraordinarily thirsty. It was kind, it was *charmant*, of Monsieur Diderot to have given up his play for her. The money was nothing, he said, *a bagatelle*, she could have more. What was money when a pretty woman was concerned. She, too, began to think it was not of so much importance, she was exaggerating its importance. Now that she was recovering her spirits, she must tell Monsieur Diderot that she was grateful to him, that he was being a good friend to her ; she felt better, well, happy again. He had been so kind, he must not bore himself with her ! She began to talk, and laugh, and show her dimples and her pretty teeth. She was not quite sure what she was saying, but she knew she was being amusing, for both of them were laughing nearly all the time.

It was quite a merry supper, but the room went up and down when she tried to cross it when she must go upstairs. She did not know why the room went round, why her head was so strange. But it was very amusing, she laughed about it as he gave her his arm, assisted her. Their rooms were in the same corridor, he assured her it was no trouble.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day, although she rose late, and her head ached fearfully, and she felt ill, desperately, miserably ill, with her fevered tongue and cracked lips, and some horrible, horrible memory that she could not put away from her, some nightmare that she dared not, could not, face, she yet would keep her promise to go to church with the children.

They came to her whilst she was still in bed. She made them clamber up, and lie on either side of her. She clasped them close ; it could not, could not be, that what she remembered was true, or that dear little face of Eugénie, with its quaint marked eyebrows and eager mobility, would not be snuggling up to her and telling her she was a dear, sweet, pretty Mumsey in her nightgown, and "Génie would be just like her when she was grown up."

It could not be true, or that little Jack on the other side, with his funny lisp, and straight hair, and eyes that were so like John's, would not be lying by her, kicking his feet on the counterpane,

and telling her he did not want to go to church ; he wanted to go on the "thands," and play with his spade and bucket. Nothing could be true, except that her children loved her, and she loved them, and would never, never be separated from them. There was a sob in her voice as she strained them to her, and made them tell her they loved her.

It was easy enough to extract sentiment from Eugénie, who liked playing at being "Mumsey's dolly," was fond of being kissed and petted and loved, and was generous with her kisses and cuddling and soft lips in response. But it was difficult with Jack, who had lost his baby ways with his two front teeth, and soon was tired of the bed, and wriggled away from his Mumsey, and stamped about the room, pretending he was a soldier, making a musket of her umbrella, and a sombrero of her best hat.

Yet it was all simple and normal, and served to reassure and comfort her, whilst Marie brought her coffee, and set about putting out her things.

It was too late to get to Houlgate in time for the service, Marie said. The tram-car went at ten minutes to eleven, and already it was half-past ten. Well, then, Jack should go on the sands as he wished. It was no use trying to bring English habits with them to the French seaside. And she would go on the sands with them, or, at least, join them there as soon as she

was dressed. She would get up, and be with them by the time Jack had built her a sand chair to sit in.

She hated getting out of bed. She hated facing the day and her thoughts. She could not push that nightmare she had had wholly away from her. There was a knock at the door whilst she was dressing, and her heart almost stopped in its beating. She was doing her hair at the moment, and the face she saw in the glass was a pale, frightened face with ashen lips ; her cold hands shook so that she could not fasten up the heavy braids. The voice with which she called out "*Entrez*" was so unsteady she had to repeat the word, and the second time it died in her throat. She had forgotten she had locked the door when the children and their nurse had gone away, the door which had been unlocked that morning when she awoke ! She turned the key now, and took the note the valet brought her.

"Y a t-il une réponse, Madame?"

"Non, non, il n'y a pas de réponse."

But she did not open the note ; to hold it in her hand even made her feel faint. It was still unopened when she had finished her dressing, when, with her parasol and her bag, and everything just as it had been yesterday, she went downstairs, and through the glass doors of the hotel and on to the front.

Everything was the same as yesterday, but *she*

was different, isolated from all and everything. It was curious how isolated she felt, and degraded, and ill, in the sunny day, among the gay promenaders.

The band was playing, her legs trembled under her, and she felt as if she could hardly get down to the sands. But the children were waiting for her, expecting her.

She looked about her quickly, nervously, when she got out of the hotel. Of course he was there, watching for her. She did not know she expected him, she did not know what she had expected. But he rose from his seat on the esplanade, cool in his grey morning clothes, with his *Petit Journal* and his cigarette. He smiled at her as he rose. And she felt suddenly down her back, down her spine, a little trickle as of cold water, a fear so deadly and so cold that she stood as one paralysed.

Léon Diderot, although he was not a gentleman, and had no pretensions to the title, nor even claimed it, was very much a man of the world. He had travelled, seen many people, learnt the shibboleths, and cultivated the outside of good manners. He spoke to her easily enough about the weather, he told her of the fire in the Casino at Trouville last night, he related the latest revelation in the Humbert case; only his eyes spoke of different matters. His eyes were hateful; it seemed she still saw the red in them. Presently,

notwithstanding she was seated by his side, feeling numbed, very cold, although the day was so warm, and answering him mechanically, talking a little, eventually, in the same vein.

"We will defer our chat, *n'est-ce pas?*" he asked presently, when the band left off playing when the esplanade began to empty, when it was evident that Cabourg was about to lunch. Now his eyes were seeking hers, and the slow colour mounted painfully into her cheeks. "There are things we must say to each other, is it not so? I am at Madame's command, completely, absolutely. Paris, Ostend, it is not too late for Spa. But it is to-morrow the *mari* arrives, to-day we must talk."

She saw her two little children, with their nurse, come up from the sands. She could almost hear Génie say, "Mumsey never came, she promised, but she never came." Perhaps Jack had made for her a seat on the sands! The eyes she turned on Léon Diderot were piteous.

"My children, *mes chers petits bébés?*" she said to him. Her voice had tears in it.

He looked away from her, he rolled up his cigarette delicately.

"*Diable!*" he said. "Bring them with you! I want you to be happy, *comfortable*. They will be in the way, but as Madame wishes, everything as Madame wishes."

And what he said next, almost under his breath,

made the scarlet flush bring painful tears. She had not strength to hate him ; it was herself she hated, loathed, herself that was so horrible to her.

It was the nightmare she was living over again, as she lunched with him, sitting opposite to him, but avoiding his eyes. In truth her misery, the degradation and desperation she felt, made her speak and move like a woman in a dream. Her pain was dull, only a sudden agony shot across her now and again, as when she remembered, for instance, the night she had heard voices in the room next to hers. She had gone to the manager, and said she could not sleep next those people, their talk was dreadful, he must give her another apartment ! He had given her another apartment. It was a shoot of agony, almost physical, when she remembered, when she wondered if the people next to her . . .

What a wearisome, terrible lunch ! When he followed her upstairs she had neither strength nor courage to oppose him. This poor, weak, wicked Julie was like a wild animal in a trap, the spring had caught her.

Afterwards she could not remember what he had said to her. When he went out of the room again, he left her shuddering, and very cold. All she realised was that she must leave Cabourg tomorrow, before John came. She must write to him. But ah ! how difficult that was ! How

long she sat with the paper before her, the pen in her hand, trying to write to John.

All the afternoon she tried to write. The sun streamed into the room, and one little pulse in her temple beat—beat so that she could not think. Her feet were so cold, her hands also, although the August sun streamed into the room, and there was no breath of air. The pain in her head was almost unbearable.

The children came in, but they chattered, and said things to her that she could not bear. She caught the little girl in her arms once, passionately, swayed with her to and fro in the chair.

"Oh, my *mignonne*, my sweet, my darling. And I love you so. Mumsey loves her little daughter—and her Jack."

Her tears streamed down, she began to sob wildly. It was Marie who suggested she should lie down on the bed and have the room darkened, and try if a cup of tea would do her good. Marie was not quite ignorant of what was going on, of the gossip in the servants' quarters along the corridor.

The tea and the darkness, and, perhaps that fit of sobbing, did her good. Toward the evening she found herself more composed, and, after Marie had put the children to bed, and persuaded her mistress to a *bouillon* in her own room, she grew quiet.

"I will sit with them whilst you are at supper,"

said this poor Julie. "Go down, for once, and I will sit with them."

She saw them sleeping side by side in their cots, she scanned their flushed and sunburnt faces. When she put her hand to her eyes to get rid of the tears that prevented her seeing them, "At least," she thought, "John will say they look well; he will not think they have been neglected."

She knelt presently between the two little cots, not to pray, she did not feel like prayer, but to put her finger into Génie's hand, to see if she would clasp it, as she had done when she was a newly born infant lying at her breast, when John had stood beside them both. Neither John nor she were of those who prayed; but that once he had knelt by the bedside, even as she was kneeling now, and his face had been hidden, and she knew a sob had escaped him, because the bed shook. She had put a weak hand on his head. She had been very ill when Génie was born, and there had been fear that John would lose both wife and baby daughter.

"Little flushed darling!" The little girl moved in her sleep, and . . . Yes! Ah! Julie was glad in her heart when the baby fist closed on her finger. "Génie wasn't angry with Mumsey"; she clasped tight the finger, and opened her eyes in her sleep, and rolled round again, all curled up, like a baby animal, but still clasping Mumsey's finger.

"She is so loving, the little sweet! She will climb on his knee, and snuggle her head against his coat, and comfort him. But I shan't be there to see . . . I shan't be there to see!"

Oh! how she cried as she knelt between the cots, and knew she would not be there to see John with her children on his knee. Jack, too! how sturdy and fine he was. He had kicked off the bedclothes; she kissed the brown leg lying in the other cot. She left it wet with her tears. How like John he was as he slept; how she longed for John! Her heart was aching, and aching unbearably, with longing.

No! she said no prayer for them as she sat in the darkened nursery listening to their breathing, knowing it was for the last time. Unless love is prayer, and repentance is prayer, and misery and all most poignant feeling are prayer, she said none.

When Marie returned, Julie went quietly from the room. But first she kissed them each again, more than once, on their warm brown cheeks. Génie stirred and almost awoke, instinct seemed as if it would wake her, would tell her, how her poor Mumsey longed that once, just once more, she would fling those loving baby arms around her neck, and say her baby words, "Génie loves Mumsey, Génie loves her pretty Mumsey." But it was not so, she slept on! And Jack slept soundly.

She wrote to John after she had left the children.

"Dear, dear husband. How can I tell you how bad I am? . . . you would not believe it. And I could not see your eyes, your face that I love, and tell you. Génie will comfort you. Darling husband, never tell her. I beg you let her think always I was her 'good sweet Mumsey.' She called me that to-day. I don't know how it all happened. You know I never meant to be so wicked . . . you will know that, darling. Oh! how I love you, I love you, and the children, and all my happy life with you. I wish I were dead, I wish I had died when Génie was born, and you knelt down by the bed, and I think you cried because we were safe. Do you remember? Now you will wish I had died then. No! I don't think you will, you won't even hate me. I know you love me. You will be sorry, sorry all the time, and you will miss me when you come home of an evening, and you will be lonely while you dress, and I am not there to chatter to you. But oh! my darling, darling, you won't be so lonely, so unhappy as I. The children will run in to you, and their voices will fill the house, and they will clamber about you, and I shall have nothing, nothing, all because of what I have done. You won't think of me unkindly, will you? You will say, 'that poor Julie,' that 'poor' that 'was my wife,' and Génie will kiss your eyelids softly, and you will forget. Only I shall never forget my happy life, and my children, and my husband that I love. . . ."

She could not write any more.

She packed her things, tears falling amongst them all the while she packed. To-morrow she would go away, early, before John came.

Léon Diderot behaved quite well, quite considerately. He met her only at the station ; the luggage was already there. She had not seen the children again ; it was the early train to Paris they were taking, and she had told Marie she was not to be disturbed. The story was all over the hotel, but there were few curious eyes open at this time in the morning.

In the train Diderot talked to her about last night's play. The bank had had phenomenal good fortune, it was fortunate, most fortunate she was not playing. He rolled his cigarette, and talked. She did not hate him. All her mind and heart were with her children, and with John when he should get her letter. And the pain in her head and in her heart were as one.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN COURTNEY arrived at Cabourg about three o'clock in the afternoon of the day Julie had left. He had travelled all night, and caught easily the connecting boat between Havre and Trouville. It is possible he was disappointed at not seeing her awaiting him at the landing-stage, she could easily have learnt the time of the arrival of the boat, he thought. It was absurd to feel any vague uneasiness or disappointment that she was not at Trouville station. She was not used to travelling alone, and Trouville might have seemed quite a journey to her. In a year or two, perhaps, when Jack was a bit bigger, that sturdy young Jack of hers, she would be satisfied to trust herself to his escort. John smiled somewhat tenderly, all to himself in the train, when he recognised he was not quite sorry that up to now she had felt herself safe nowhere without her husband's escort.

But, at Cabourg, where he had his head, and half his body, out of the window at least three minutes before the train stopped, when there was no sign

of her, or the children, or even Marie with an explanation, there is no doubt his heart sank. Why, even when they had been separated but a day, when he had gone to Rochester, or to Chatham, she had met him at Southampton station with eager welcoming, full of the day's news, the night's loneliness, the gladness of his return. And now it was a fortnight since they had met !

There was no one from the *Grand Hôtel de Cabourg* on the platform ; not Julie, not Marie, nor the children. A couple of Frenchmen got out of the train, also an *ouvrier* with his wife, and a little boy ; these were on the platform, but, for the rest, the station was empty.

The omnibus from the Grand Hotel was waiting outside. He could not ask the porter, although he wore on his cap the legend, "*Grand Hôtel de Cabourg*," if everything was all right. It was astonishing how his heart had failed him, how heavy it was, what a presentiment of trouble he had already.

The two Frenchmen who had been in the train got into the omnibus with him. It seemed they had gone to Trouville on a *locomobile*, there had been a breakdown, and they had had to take the train. John was glad to listen to them talking, it would make the way shorter while that lumbering omnibus jolted up the narrow street. But a sentence that leaped from the lips of the

Baron d'Avril—for, of course, it was the Baron d'Avril—startled him, and arrested his attention completely.

“It is lucky it was not by *locomobile* that the *jolie Anglaise* and the Belgian started to go to Paris. They might have encountered the *mari* on the road, the *mari* who was to arrive this afternoon, and whom it would perhaps be amusing to watch.” Then he told his companion the story of what he had seen a few days previously in the corridor. Told it as he had translated it. It lost nothing through the fact that the Baron d'Avril had thought Julie pretty and fascinating when he had driven her from the races, and had come back to find that she had forgotten to be pretty and fascinating to him.

John, though he believed nothing, and understood only half, and knew it could not be his Julie of whom they were talking, yet went suddenly grey round the lips. Although his mouth was so firmly set and rigid, yet his lips were white and his face was grey.

If he had been the English husband of the lady of whom they were talking they would not have found it amusing to watch him, for he would have shown nothing.

Curious looks, sympathetic looks, cynical looks he met, as he stood in the hall of the hotel; whispers and shrugs and stares. But he was not amusing, this English husband!

Monsieur Charles came forward ; he knew who it was, and was ready with explanations, with shrugs, with sympathy, with anything that would be welcome.

John briefly said the porter need not take up his things.

Dieu ! How stiff he was and cold, it was no wonder that Madame had fled from him. But with Monsieur Diderot ! That was *drole !*

The Baron d'Avril, who realised now that it was he who had told, by his incautious conversation, this English husband what had become of his wife, was ready to apologise for what he had done. But John was unapproachable as he stood in the hall of the hotel and listened, still without a word, to what the manager should tell him. He could not know the little feeling of malice, of hurt vanity, that led the Baron d'Avril to be so interested in watching how he took the news.

"Madame had left a note for Monsieur—the *bonne* had it ; should he call the *bonne* downstairs to Monsieur ?" asked Monsieur Charles.

No ; John would go up.

When he was in the children's room, and Génie had climbed on his knee, and Jack stood sturdily before him, both of them looking so sunburnt and well, it was indeed as she had thought. He saw they had not been neglected, he saw they looked sunburnt and well ; he was glad in their well-being.

With Génie on his knee and his arm around her, with her curly little head nestling against his shoulder, he read his wife's letter, which Marie handed to him so silently. He read it very cursorily. He was to read it many times again, and get all the comfort he could from the love in it. Just now he read it only cursorily. Notwithstanding that he was half stunned by his sudden trouble, and he had been travelling all night, notwithstanding that he had had little food since yesterday, and was in bad trim for thinking, his mind was quite made up, had been already made up, possibly, when in the omnibus he heard the two Frenchmen laugh and befoul his wife with their words.

He sent the children out of the room, telling them to run away and play. He had no need then to question Marie. Marie, who loved her mistress, and had the national tolerance for moral lapses, told him volubly, immediately, all that she thought he should hear.

She told him how Madame had played, and had lost large sums of money, and had suffered because of what Monsieur might say, and of how she had cried, and cried, on Sunday, poor lady, and sat with her children and rocked them in her arms, and cried again. *Ce Monsieur Diderot, par exemple . . .*

But that John waved away ; to that he would not listen.

He thought he had at once the clue, the explanation, the story of her flight. She had played baccarat after he had written her not to do so. She had lost money, she—she had been frightened to face him. That was terrible to him. How harsh he must have been, how unreasonable sometimes, that she should be frightened to face him. He knew he had a bad temper, was rough, and not always able to say the tender things he meant. And so she had not realised how much he cared for her. She was frightened of his intolerance, his temper. She was so young; the gambling was in her blood. Did she really think he would go back to Southampton without her, keep her children to comfort him, and leave her in the cold? *Miss her?* Why, the home, the days, the life, without her smiles and welcome, would be impossible; he could not, would not face them lonely. When his little girl was in his arms, and his son stood before him, neither of them had he seen as clearly as his poor Julie sitting by their cots last night in the dark. Oh! why had he not come one day sooner?

He wasted little time after he had heard all that Marie could tell him. He went downstairs again, rejecting all sympathy, all that the curious *Maître d'Hôtel* or head waiter would have told him, when they took his order, as he sat at the empty *table d'hôte* making a meal that was a necessity, meanwhile making also his plans. He

wanted to hear nothing. He asked the time of the afternoon train to Paris. He heard without wincing the confidence that it was to the Hôtel Terminus they had gone.

His poor little Julie! How plainly he saw her, sitting crying by her children, because she had lost so much money, and she dared not wait to tell him. The rest he pushed from his mind. There was love—love for him, and him alone, in that letter. Already he had it open again:

"Darling, darling! you won't be so lonely, so unhappy as I."

He was not going to let her be lonely and unhappy. Why should he? She belonged to him, the contract between them was for life. He would follow her, and take her back with him to Southampton. Poor child! he must school his lips to tender words, he must make her not afraid of him. She could not have lost so much, and now he was well off. But if it cost him all he had . . .

The fever and obsession of gambling which John had forgotten, which personally he had never known, came suddenly to his consciousness as he sat eating the food which was necessary, but which had no flavour.

He was following her with his mind, going back with her through the days. He had seen the hold this gambling had had upon her father. Why had he not remembered before? How he

blamed himself that he had exposed her to this temptation, that he had left her unguarded, just when she needed guardianship.

It was only the gambling John saw. To anything and everything else he shut his eyes. He knew his wife loved him.

He began re-reading her letter in the train to Paris. He read it many times in the days that followed.

He found them at the Hôtel Terminus.

There was no disguise or difficulty about it. Once he had brought himself to realise that "*Madame Diderot*" meant his poor Julie, every word of whose letter to him was aching in his heart, the rest was easy.

"*Monsieur désire-t-il les voir ?*"

Monsieur, with dry lips and beating heart, said that he wished to see the lady, two minutes' conversation would be sufficient.

"But it was so late!"

Monsieur enforced his wishes with an English sovereign, and the curious face and gold-braided hat melted from his sight. But the time before it was there again seemed interminable to the man whose overwhelming impatience beat, and throbbed, and happily stunned a little his imagination.

The porter returned, more eager, more curiously shrugging, voluble, confiding, hoping to be confided in.



Page 102. **He began re-reading her letter in the train to Paris**



"Monsieur et Madame had arrived some hours before. They had arrived together, but" . . . the gesticulation conveyed sympathy . . .

It appeared that Madame had been taken ill in the train. It was not himself, it was a subordinate who had received them; poor lady! She was helped from the fiacre, she looked . . . Ah! she looked so white, so pale, they all thought she would die. Monsieur had been impatient, quickly they had sent for a doctor. He had been with her, and yet again. A *garde malade* had been summoned, was with her now. Madame was very ill, the *propriétaire* was perturbed, there was talk of *l'Hôpital*, but that was for to-morrow. To night the *Sœur* sat up with her, but she talk, she rave. Ah! how she rave! No one could see her, the *garde malade* had said it. Monsieur could head her, if he pleased, even through the closed door of her room.

Was no one, then, with her but the *Sœur*?

He could not ask the other question, for the answer to which he nevertheless waited.

She was alone but for the *Sœur*. Ce Monsieur Diderot was in Numero 27. He had retired, it was a long time. Should he awaken him?

"Certainly not. Which is Madame's room?" he asked abruptly.

The sovereign was potent. John had the privilege of listening to a delirium that came muffled through the door, to the sound of groans, and

some quiet soothing note that alternated with these.

"Could he retain the room adjoining?"

Ah! but he would be disturbed! They had offered Monsieur Diderot that room, and Monsieur Diderot had said . . .

"Monsieur Diderot could be damned and blasted to hell. . . ."

The bloodshot eyes and sudden passion-tortured voice raised the curiosity of *Monsieur le Concierge* to boiling pitch.

But he suspected, already everybody in the hotel suspected, and were on the tiptoe of excitement for the *dénouement*. It was, it must be, an elopement. This was *Monsieur le mari* in pursuit! There would be a murder, a duel! He would kill his wife, he would shoot Monsieur Diderot. Ah! what excitement, what distraction for the Hôtel Terminus! *Monsieur le propriétaire* must be allowed to sleep peacefully. To-morrow it would be time to tell him. But to-night they would watch, when with his knife or his pistol *Monsieur le Mari* should crawl into her room. This Englishman with his bloodshot eyes, Monsieur Paul the porter, or Monsieur Charles the boots, would be behind him, would seize his arm and say *Arrêtez-vous*, and . . .

The men, and the two chambermaids, who were still up, were quite intoxicated with the thought of the drama they would witness, the publicity that

would attend them, all the excitement that was in store.

John had the room he craved, where the privilege of listening to the sick woman's ravings would be his throughout the night. He was bewildered with the attention the whole waking establishment lavished upon him. They came in one by one, on this pretext or the other, to make his bed, to take away his boots, to offer him *un petit souper* or a cognac, or what he would have after his journey, to stare at him, and note his abstraction, and the listening look that had come into those strained bloodshot eyes.

But he got rid of them all at last, and locked his door, and was alone to listen, and walk up and down, and read and re-read his letter, and wait for the morning, with what patience he could muster.

Once in that long nightmare of a night, when the moaning in the next room was more than he could bear, he suddenly decided he would go in. It was his wife's room, *his* room ! He could soothe, he knew he could soothe her, better than the French nun ! He unbolted his door. He had meant to have waited for the morning, to have—have established his right, to have stamped on the head of that reptile, kicked him out of the path. But she moaned and moaned.

When he opened the door, he was conscious of the gold-braided cap, of the curious face, of the

obsequious, intrusive, "Can I get you anything, *sire*; is there anything Monsieur needs?"

He banged the door to again. The consciousness of his position stung him, made his blood boil, and surge even into his flushing face and eyes.

And yet he knew he wanted his self-possession, all his wits and self-possession. He had her to save, and in more ways than one. It must be made clear, the reason of this hurried journey. He must, if needs be, make terms with this scoundrel, this Diderot. He had his letter of credit with him, only he must make no false move. It was not only Julie, but Julie's name that must be saved. It was essential that he should act warily. He even undressed, and lay down in his bed, hoping exhaustion would bring him sleep, and sleep, strength, subtlety and courage, so anxious was he that, when he had to act, it should be with clearness and precision.

CHAPTER VIII

THE news of the arrival of Julie's husband was brought to Monsieur Diderot in the morning with his *café*. His first emotion was of relief !

Monsieur Diderot, the professional gambler, was altogether put out and distracted by the position in which he found himself. He had been carried away by his dream when he had left Cabourg for Paris with Julie Courtney. He had all a gambler's superstition ; he had won, won, won, since he had been at Cabourg. Julie brought him luck, and would bring him more. It had mounted to his head a little that she had consented so readily to join her fortunes with his.

But in the train she had become suddenly ill, she had seemed not to know where she was. When the train stopped he had ordered cognac for her, but it had done no good. She had grown worse and worse, she had become pale, faint, and had talked as if in fever. By the time they got to the Gare St. Lazare she was half unconscious, and had to be lifted from the train.

He was distracted. The doctor, hastily sum-

moned to the hotel, had told him she was ill, very ill, the fever high, it was impossible, now she was here, that she could be moved ! *If* she got well—there was an “if” it seemed—it would not be for a long time, a very long time. He must have a nurse, perhaps two !

Ah ! it was terrible for Monsieur Diderot, who had his living to get, and had not been used to spend money, except upon himself !

He, no less than John, had slept uneasily ; he was all distracted. What should he do ? He could not stay in Paris during August ! At Spa, Boulogne, Wimereux, he could have remained, but Paris in August !

Must he then leave her to live or to die, alone, in this hotel, his mascotte, the pretty *ingénue* who had fled with him ? The idea distracted him . . . and then there was the expense !

It was all very unfortunate for Léon Diderot, and he slept ill. That is, at least, he went to bed before his usual hour, for what can one do in Paris in August ? and he awoke miserably early.

And now he heard Monsieur *le mari* was here, and wished to speak with him. He had no fear of a scene, what had he to lose ? And for shooting, as that *garçon stupide* had suggested . . . well ! he also carried a weapon. And for brute force—for of anything these Englishers were capable, Jean declared—Jean himself might

remain outside the door, and Jules too, and they could rush in if he called.

The key was taken out of the door ; Jean and Jules were stationed outside. Then, and then only, was John Courtney shown into the bedroom, all gilt and mirror, red plush and incongruity, where Léon Diderot, in velvet coat and with the inevitable cigarette, awaited his coming with calm.

Monsieur le Mari was bigger than Diderot had anticipated. His eyes were somewhat bloodshot, nevertheless he looked quiet, commonplace. Bah ! but he knew nothing, this husband . . .

" Monsieur Diderot ? "

Monsieur Diderot was not to be outdone in courtesy. He had meant to keep his seat, but now he rose and bowed.

At the sight of him bowing, smiling there, at the thought of what he was, and had done to him, John's gorge rose. He forgot how he had meant to behave, what he had meant to say. He felt sick, physically and mentally he swerved a moment from his balance ; the flush under his grey skin was painful.

With a wave of his hand, John noted the tobacco-stained fingers, Léon indicated a chair for his visitor.

So he was afraid, this Englishman, he trembled, his lips were pale. *Tiens !* for what then had he come ?

"Monsieur does not object to smoke?" he asked, perhaps a little more insolently, seeing that John had accepted the proffered seat, was breathing a little quickly, and was not at ease as his first words, and his coming, had implied. Léon replaced his cigarette in his mouth, puffing at it delicately, deliberately.

Still John's emotion held him, and for all he had meant to say, his tongue was tied. But his fingers were tingling, his eyes bloodshot. All night he had heard her moaning, all night it had maddened his ears. And this was the man!

Diderot went on, suavely:

"Monsieur has perhaps but just arrived . . . *la mer*; it had been rough in the Channel, perhaps? Ah! *le mal de mer*! it was horrible, for himself, he was not affected, but . . ."

"*Fool!*" burst from John's lips. "*Fool!*" He rose to his feet, swaying on them a little. For that was not how he had meant to begin, what he had meant to say.

"Wait a moment," he muttered, "wait."

It was to himself he was speaking. Léon had slunk smaller, his lips grown a thinner line. There was a moment's pause, the room with its plush and ormolu, its tarnished tawdriness, its flyblown lustre ornaments, its gimcrack furniture and shabby carpet, reminded Julie's husband where he was, for what he had come.

Léon had seen the red gleam in John's eyes,

the tense muscles of his hands, heard the husky note in his voice, and for an instant he forgot that Jean and Jules were at hand, that he had nothing to fear.

Then John pulled himself together. The agonising desire which had awoke in him at the sight of the smirking Belgian, with his waxed moustache and stained fingers, and hard cynic eyes, for physical vengeance, the desire, the necessity almost, to seize, strangle, beat the viperous head against the floor, was a force with which he had not reckoned. It had carried him off his feet, shaken him out of calm and reason, dehumanised him for the time it lasted. The phase passed, leaving him still shaken. Now it was himself, not Léon Diderot, with whom he had to reckon. But he had his wife to save, it was not of himself, of what the man had done to him, that he must dare to think. John had thought it all over, he had decided to keep calm. And this . . . this was how he would do it! He pulled himself together. Mechanically now the words upon which he had decided came to his lips; the danger was past.

To Léon the hot day had turned chill, he still rolled his cigarette, but his fingers were unsteady. He moistened his thin lips with his narrow tongue, for they had suddenly gone dry.

"I beg your pardon," said John stiffly, as he steadied himself; he remembered he had called

the man a fool. He *was* a fool not to have known he stared at death those few seconds. But now John said :

"I beg your pardon."

"Monsieur was faint . . . a glass of wine ?"
Léon recovered himself even more quickly than the Englishman, but fear had shaken him, his voice had not yet returned in volume.

"I'm here on business. I am John Courtney."

Again Léon bowed, interrogatively.

"You met my wife at Cabourg ?"

Léon raised his eyes, now they were narrowed and watching, as they had watched when he had been croupier. He had seen even Englishmen cheat.

"At Cabourg ? Yes ! at Cabourg, of course."

"She played baccarat."

"*Un peu*, perhaps. Madame was not what you call *plongeuse*."

"She had not enough money with her to go on with."

"Monsieur has been well informed, it appears."

"You assisted her."

"If it were so, I am proud." Notwithstanding those shaky fingers of his, he imitated sufficiently well the class with whom he wished to assimilate himself.

It was a lesson he was being taught, it was a dictation that was being given him. Well . . .

"Then she wanted to go back."

"She desired to leave Cabourg," Léon repeated.

"To return to me, to . . . to tell me what she had lost ; to get the money."

"Monsieur knows best."

"You travelled with her as far as here ?"

"Monsieur has said it."

"Well ! your work's done. I'm here to look after her ; you can get back."

John's self-control was the effort of his lifetime. Knowing as little as he did, putting it away, believing nothing, yet his throat choked, his hands ached, his eyes ached, with the desire to seize hold of this mountebank, whose name had been connected with his Julie's, to strangle him, to knock his head against the wall, to crush the lying degraded life out of him. "You can get back," repeated John.

"That must be as Madame wishes," Léon said, and gave a twist to his moustache. He put on the air of a gallant in his ignorance of what underlay John's calm. He learnt it quickly.

John's control gave way abruptly. He caught hold of the man who dared to have the air of a gallant when he spoke of her, of John Courtney's wife.

"You will, will you, damn you !" He shook him violently, while the veins in his forehead swelled. The squeak Léon gave was like a mouse's squeak. The men he thought were outside had

been called to their duties, and, when he realised this, when he called out again and no one entered, he went yellow and livid with fright, so limp and so abject, and so resistless, that John's rage died as suddenly as it had flamed up.

Again he remembered what was at stake.

"Keep her name off your tongue, that's all, unless you want to be shot out of the window. It's with me you've got to deal this time; not with a woman. You—you cur."

"Monsieur . . . Monsieur will fight."

"Fight!"

The contempt in John's voice was reflected in his action. "I could shake the life out of you, you rat; a lot of fight you've got in you!" But the mere slight exercise of his strength, of holding the creature and shaking him, and seeing his colour turn, gave John back his self-possession. He flung him into the corner, as if he had been indeed the rodent of which he spoke.

"Clear out! that's what you've got to do, and in double quick time. How much did you lend her?"

To Léon Diderot, whose teeth were chattering, who could not recover from the shaking he had had, who had a thousand things to say, bitter, satirical, biting things that he could not get out, that he was too frightened to speak, seeing that Jean and Jules had deserted him, and he was alone with this madman, the last sentence was like

a douche of cold water. He staggered under it; his teeth were chattering, but he recovered under it, as John said again impatiently :

"You lent her money. Don't I know she wouldn't have stood you for a minute if it hadn't been that? How much? Out with it."

Tiens! but how *drôle!* He would not fight, but he would give him money. He would buy back this little woman. Ah! if only Jean and Jules were outside, or better still, were here, he would say a little thing to him, a word to him . . .

"How much?" growled John, like the bear, the English bear that he was, giving a man no time to think, to calculate.

"At the tables?"

"The *Caisse* is settled. I mean her debt to you, the personal debt."

Ah! how Diderot wanted to say a word, a little word. His eyes were narrowed, and his thin tongue was venomous. But there was white under the greyness of John Courtney's opaque skin, there was still red in his eyes. Almost Léon could see that the hands which now held the pocket-book, the pocket-book thick with notes, were hot and tingling. They were an outrageous size, those hands. There was no delicacy, no *finesse* about this Englishman; he was a mere brute. Well! he would bleed, he was a beast that would bleed. There were plenty of women. *Peste!* the world was full of them.

"Madame is in my debt two thousand francs."

But one thousand would be consolation for the loss of her charming society, he said to himself.

John counted out the notes. He was glad to hear it was so much. What did it matter what he did for her, his little Julie, in the power of a thing like this? The jealousy of a John Courtney could not be roused by a Léon Diderot. She had to be taken care of, and he had failed in his trust. Let him get rid of the man, pay him, kick him out; then he could go back to her, try to win her confidence, make her understand she must get well. There was nothing to fear, he was looking after her, waiting to take her back to Southampton. The children, too, would be waiting for her there.

Her illness somehow or other comforted him, confirmed her letter, explained it. It had been an impulse, a sudden unwarranted, misguided impulse, which had driven her hurriedly from Cabourg. God! what hideous spectres had been conjured up by these damned Frenchmen. *His* little Julie!



Mid-day saw John seated by the bed-side of his wife



CHAPTER IX

MID-DAY saw John seated by the bedside of his wife. She did not recognise him, neither then, nor during the many days that followed. He sat there, by the bedside, listening to her delirious raving, cutting a strange figure before the *Sœur* and the doctor, and the hotel attendants, who came in and out, and whispered about his story, and knew well enough all that had occurred, notwithstanding the fact that Monsieur Diderot had gone, and that John Courtney had remained.

It was brain fever ; she might live, she might die, the doctors said. She grew so weak that they had to feed the inflammation rather than let her die of exhaustion.

Notwithstanding all the things she said in her raving, all her delirious mutterings, John hardly moved from the bedside. If he could have been glad, if, with his horrible doubts and distress, there had been any room in his heart or mind for gladness, or thanksgiving, he would have been glad that he had followed her, that he had come

up with her. For, amongst all the things she said, the name of John came oftenest.

"John, John, John!"

Sometimes, for hour after melancholy hour, in the sick room, there was nothing but this, and the jargon of the baccarat tables:

"Faites vos jeux, faites vos jeux. Huit à la Banque, neuf à la Banque, la Banque gagne!" And then "John" again, with sweet words, and tender words, and words that wrung his heart.

Once, when the fever for the moment had left her, and she was lying exhausted, and her voice was so low that he had to bend over to her so that he might hear, she spoke to him as if she knew him. There was no recognition in the eyes that looked into his, but she spoke as if she knew him.

"Do you know what *baccarat* means, John, my John? It is worthless, valueless, nothing; you throw it away, you have lost, everything, it is all gone. That is me, *baccarat*! John, I am *baccarat*, valueless, nothing—are you listening?" And then the thread went, and the rest was mere quick, incoherent babble.

At last the day came when the fever and the inflammation were both gone. Weak, exhausted, after nearly twenty-three hours' almost unbroken sleep, John's anxiety meanwhile giving place to hope, and hope to sceptic certainty, she awoke and smiled at John, as she had smiled at him on

waking through all the years of their married life.

"Is that you, John?" she said in her weak low voice, "Is that my John?" put out a feeble hand and smiled.

Then he broke down a little; then, for the first time, his calm gave way and he had to hurry from the room. He was back again before she had been fed with her bouillon, before she had sunk back on her pillows.

"Don't go away. Why did you go away?" she asked, almost querulously. "I wanted you to be here."

It was absurd to have attached any importance to the things that had broken from her in delirium. She was the old Julie whom he had nursed through illnesses before, who had demanded everything from him. What nightmare had he allowed to haunt him? Why had he listened, and let it touch or haunt him?

"Here, I say, now, you'll have to keep quiet. No talking allowed. I'm not going to move. Just you drink what she's offering you, and go off to sleep, that's what's you've got to do."

"I will not speak. But sit there, sit there where I can see you all the time. I think I have been very ill. I have had dreams, horrible, terrible dreams. I dreamt that you were not there, that I was all alone, always alone, that the children were not there, that——"

Her pale, sweet face was working, already the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Vous ne devez pas l'agiter, Monsieur; Madame est à peine hors de danger."

He gave way to authority, resuming his seat by her bedside, ceasing to speak to her. And yet he wondered dully what sort of danger she had been in, from what peril he had rescued her. The last ten days had been filled with anxiety, for her life had been in actual danger. Yet the background of his days and nights held something as bad, or worse, than this anxiety; he had not faced it yet. It flashed out during the watches of the night, assailed him unawares in the early dawn, but he gave it no welcome.

Now that her life was no longer in danger, and she neared convalescence, he was conscious of wrestling always with ugly doubt. She watched him wistfully round the room; she lay quiet for hours watching him. But her eyes were not merry and dancing, as they had been, they were strained with fear. Her progress was very slow. Once or twice, when the nurse was out of the room, he thought she wanted to tell him something, to confide something to him. But a terrible timidity lay about her, and soon about them both. He dreaded to hear what she would tell him, he would not hear it. He tried one one day to tell her so.

"I suppose you're worrying that little head of

yours about something or other. What's the good? What's past is past. Make haste and get well, I want to get back to work. Don't you want to get back to the kids?"

She scanned his face breathlessly, her colour rising and rising, the strained eyes more terrified still. Then the tears rose in them, hot and scalding, not like Julie's tears, she turned her face away from him, and buried it in the pillow. He saw the heave of her shoulders, and bent over her.

"Here, that won't do, you know; that's not allowed."

He was so awkward, so inarticulate, and cursed himself for it. "What a blundering fool I am," he thought.

"Julie!" he burst out in desperation, "for God's sake, don't cry, leave off crying. If we must have it out, we must. It's all settled, that fellow's levanted; there's nothing for you to do but to get well, and to come home."

But still her face was turned from him.

"Oh! John! if you knew, if you only knew," were the words he heard, as he bent over the bed.

"My dear!"

Even she had hardly heard from him so tender a voice, and yet it was gruff.

"What's all this about knowing? You were carried away by the play, I ought not to have left

you alone then. I've settled up, it won't break me."

It was more and more difficult for him to speak.

"And if it did . . . well, I like to pay your debts. Why shouldn't I? Julie!"—it was almost a cry—"get well, let's forget all this. I want my wife."

She turned to him, and he gathered her in his arms. There was a minute's silence between them. He bent his head, now he would have kissed her lips. But she had not spoken:

"No, No, No!" in a rising crescendo, and again her face was hidden, but this time against his shoulder. He felt, rather than saw, the shame that overwhelmed her. As for him, his heart went cold, and what little voice he had was frozen in his throat.

And then, all of a sudden, she flung her arms about his neck, and sought the kiss she had refused, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh! John, John. Forgive me, forgive me. I can't live without you. I can't, can't, can't!"

"Who's talkin' of living without me?" The words trembled hoarsely in his throat.

"Oh! I know I'm wicked; you could put me away. Oh! don't do it, darling. I love you so, and the children. Do forgive me. . . . You don't know what I've done. But I hated him, John, I hated him. John, take me back!"

His blood ran cold, the arms that held her relaxed ; he had wanted *not* to know, he had put the knowledge persistently away. She would not let his arms relax, she held herself to him, clung to him, prayed to him, entreated him ; and he could not bear it. She was shaken with passionate tears and entreaty. He had to play the man, and it was not like a man that he felt, but like a madman. He heard her frantic prayers to him for forgiveness. His poor little Julie ! "Don't put me away. I can't live without you, don't."

"Who's talkin' of putting away ?" he said huskily.

"You will forgive me ? Some day, *soon*, John !"

Her arms were tight around his neck, her lips were entreating, seeking his.

"You cannot, I know you cannot, not at once. But if you say you will, you will." For even she knew that of John.

He was wrestling in the throes of an anguish that had seized him suddenly like a living thing, an unbearable spasm of physical jealousy. She held him, she clung to him . . . he let her hold and cling. And soon the feel of her slender figure against him, the touch of her clinging arms, the sound of her tears, recalled another time.

He recalled the hour when the child, for she was only a child then, had flung herself into his arms. He had asked her awkwardly to be his

wife, and she had flung herself into his arms, and burst out that she loved him ! The lovely child ! And he, *gauche*, shy, had been overwhelmed by what she had awakened in him. He had vowed himself to her in that hour. A man must keep his vow, whether he had written it, or spoken it, or vowed it to himself when for the first time sweet love had broken in living waters over his soul, flooding it with ecstasy, changing the world. John could not change ; already his arms were tightening around her.

"But you must say it. I know if you say it, it is done. John, say 'Little Julie, I forgive you, I love you again.' Oh ! John."

"I have never ceased to love you."

His voice was husky ; for once he could speak.

"I don't want to know what you've done, I couldn't bear to hear it. Whatever it is, I forgive you. Oh ! Julie, don't you know you are the light of my eyes ?"

And she was awed by the sob that broke from him, the one deep sob. He laid her back gently in her bed, he hurried from the room. He could not go on talking, neither could he face her, just at that minute. He must be alone.

What he suffered was terrible. And he had let the man go ! He had had his hands on the man's throat, and let him go. Oh God ! for another chance. He'd wring the life out of him, strangle him like a dog . . .

CHAPTER X

HE could not return to her that night. All should be as before between them. He had promised to forgive her, he *had* forgiven her, and he would not go back on it. But he must have a little time to himself, to grow accustomed to it, to face what he had undertaken.

His night was sleepless, but in the morning he heard that Julie had slept like a little child. John, in that white night of his, tried to reason it out, to strengthen himself with reason. Had it been himself to whom such an adventure had befallen ; a week's gambling, a glass too much of wine, an indiscretion ; would not, with many men he knew, have counted seriously against him. They would think it a cause for laughter, for chaff. He had hardly realised until now, when he set out to argue on behalf of his poor Julie, how rigid were his own moral views. But he based them on the words he had said at the altar : " Forsaking all others, keep thou only unto her, as long as you both shall live." . . . And he had answered : " I will."


To him a promise was a promise. But he knew every man did not feel like that. Numbers of men he knew had committed adultery, pleasant fellows, good fellows, who were respected, and held their heads high. But for a woman it was damning. Why should there be one law for the man and another for the woman? It was not fair; he would not subscribe to it.

It was so simple to say all that, so difficult to keep himself steady, and avert his mind from all that had occurred. The forgiveness must be complete. If he could not get the matter out of his mind, nor the bitterness of it out of his heart, at least he could keep control of himself so that she should not suspect there was a flaw in the entirety of his pardon. She must laugh again, dimple into happy smiles, sing about his house; only then would he have kept his word. She must not see that he suffered.

He dreaded going to her room the next morning. But when she greeted him with a smile as if nothing had happened, his heart fell. But in him, too, perhaps, she saw no difference! He, too, was calm on the surface; he would not judge her.

"Oh! I have slept so sound. The good Sister says if I sleep like that, I shall so soon be well. That will be nice, is it not so? We will go home, back to dear Southampton, to our little house."

John knew everything, and had forgiven her.



She was back in port again, riding at ease in the wide calm harbour of his love. To please him, she must grow strong quickly. What could he do with himself in this French hotel, away from his office? What she must do for him first, to show how she loved him, was to get well quickly.

It was marvellous to him how quickly she grew strong, after that day when she learnt that he knew everything, forgave everything, bade her forget everything. Endlessly now she questioned him about the little house at Southampton, the window boxes, and what flowers would be there for September, the new chintzes, ordered before she had left, the cleaning of the curtains, and all the sweet commonplaces of their happy days. Sometimes, indeed, a sudden swift remembrance seemed to dye the thin cheek. But then with a graceful, quick movement she would hide against his shoulder, or his arm, or any part of him that was handy, saying nothing. Then he would suffer.

Of what was she thinking, what had she remembered? Already in the first few days after he had given his promise, there were times when he thought that what he had undertaken might prove impossible. At others her unconsciousness that everything was poisoned for him by what had occurred, helped him to think himself mistaken, to ease him. After all, nothing could have happened, or she could not be at times so

nearly gay. The hours when he said to himself, "*nothing could have happened,*" and the hours when he said to himself that in any case there should not be one law for the woman and one for the man, were divided by the hours that he spent by her side, cheating himself into a belief that he believed it.

Marie sent her the children's letters. These were not long, and both Julie and John could laugh over them.

"Dere Mumsy, cum soon; Janes ~~kakes~~ is beestly," was Jack's effusion.

Génie was a loving little soul :

"I miss my Mumsy ; I want her to come back to her derely loving little girl. Nobody kisses me good night," Julie read with tears. But when the tears brimmed over, John's coat sleeve had the benefit.

How sick he grew of that French hotel in the days of Julie's convalescence ; how he hated its *café complet*, its plush and mirrors, the food he shared with Julie in her bedroom, or, worse still, the meals he ordered for himself in the *table d'hôte* room. He scarcely went out at all. The empty boulevards, the cafés with their deserted chairs and idle *garçons*, the dust and smells, which are all of Paris that remains in August, were a weariness and disgust to him. He wanted to be home. Among familiar things his forgetfulness might grow genuine.

It came at length, the day of his release, the day when nurse and doctor and Julie herself agreed she was well enough to travel. Genie and Jack need wait no more. She would not answer their letters until she could tell them she would come.

It would be on Thursday ; they would travel at night, so that the children might meet the morning boat. She took a long time composing her letter, sitting in the easy chair, a pillow from the bed propped against her back, her writing pad on her lap. From time to time she raised her head to ask John's opinion, John's advice. He was sitting opposite to her, *Galignani* in his hand, He could not read it, because he was asking himself, yet trying not to do so, if she remembered the last letter she had written, the one that was still in his pocket-book, which he had read so often.

"It will be cold, so early in the morning. I shall tell Marie that Génie must wear her serge—and her reefer cap. Do you think I am right, John ?"

"I am telling her to see that Jack doesn't stand too near the edge of the quay ; she must hold his hand when our boat comes in sight ; he will be excited——"


"Jane must have breakfast ready for us ; you will be hungry so early ; bacon for you, and coffee a new laid egg, English jam. I should like the

children to breakfast with us just for once." And she looked up wistfully :

"Oh ! John, do you think I might say the children will breakfast with us, just that morning we come home ?"

And John said shortly, trying to put that last letter out of his mind, that she was quite right about the serge dress, and that certainly Marie must hold Jack's hand, and that it would be very agreeable for once to have the children's company at breakfast.

Julie thought it was fortunate that they had so calm, so beautiful, a night for their steamer journey. The stars were shining, and the sea was so smooth that she could not feel the motion of the vessel. She sat on deck the early part of that wonderful night, holding John's hand, talking. It had always been she who chattered, John who listened, and it was no different now, not a bit different. They both of them told themselves this so constantly that perhaps it would become true. In any case, they sat together on the deck as the vessel bore them homeward, her head against his shoulder, her hand seeking his. Presently she slept there, too, under the darkened canopy of the sky, and John sat holding her. His wife was his own again. There had been no other woman in his life, no need for one. This was his, this pretty, weak, pathetic Julie. What if she had disappointed him, he need not let her



see it. She had been sinned against, was not sinful. His arm ached with holding her, and the ache in his arm presently helped him to forget the other ache that was fastening on him, like an inward cancer, throwing its roots deep down.

The ship steamed on, but now the night changed. There were no more stars, and the moon too was hidden. The sea turned sullen, and the wind that rose seemed to stir its depths. It heaved and moaned, as if it threatened and warned. The air grew chill.

"There's a storm coming, sir ; best take your lady downstairs."

She hardly awoke as John carried her down the hatchway, laid her in the bunk, and covered her warmly. He was gentle enough with her, for all his size and awkwardness. She was fragile still, and pathetic in her sleep. She was in his blood, this woman, he could not separate himself from her. She stirred and clung to him, he kissed her almost passionately, then roughly bade her sleep on.

"Dear John !" she murmured sleepily.

John could not bear the heat and confinement of her cabin ; he hardly knew what ailed him. He got up the companion ladder, and into the air again quickly. The coming storm suited his coming mood. He was ashamed of his sufferings, To hide them from her was easy, from himself difficult, almost impossible. He was inarticulate,

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dry and dumb. But already in these last days there had been times, it would have been impossible for it to have been otherwise, when thoughts came to him, and pictures shaped themselves, when his eyes were on fire, and the back of his neck swelled, and his heart turned to water, seeing what he saw, knowing what had been done to him.

To-night had been one of those occasions. His passion for his wife had not died out, nor lessened, in the years of their married life. This had been their first separation, and it had lasted two months. As he carried her down the hatchway, as he felt in his arms her slender grace and beauty, as he kissed her sleeping cheek, agony and repulsion rose together in his throat, choking his desire for her, wrenching him from his calm.

The thing had been so beautiful. She had rounded his life, and made it complete. No man in Southampton was so happy or so proud as he. Now the machinery was all jarred and broken. As he held her in his arms, as his passion for her drew that kiss from him, he felt the jar of that spoilt mechanism, he was flung apart from her as if by the rotation of the wheel.

Shaken by the revolt, and anguished, he walked the deck. He tried to get clear with himself, he *had* to get clear.

He remembered that day, so many years ago, when, in Madame Courvoisier's salon, he had felt

in his boy's soul the stirring of some new life, some new emotion, that he had thought it was love for this charming French woman, with gaiety and sadness struggling together in her eyes, this woman old enough to be his mother, who had treated him as a man, made him forget his twenty-one years, and thrilled him with her kindness, and who, when he had seized her hand, and covered it with kisses, and commenced some incoherent sentence, had interrupted him, quite innocently, apparently to talk to him of her child, of her little Julie. Surely it was then already that the great romance had commenced. He had kissed Madame's hand, and she had talked to him of *la petite*!

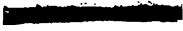

He saw himself *gauche*, provincial, in no sense a man of the world, until the three weeks at Boulogne, the friendship, the condescension of the Courvoisiers, had made him one. Whatever else the Baron and the Baroness may have been, less or more than the world saw them, their sphere was larger, wider, than his own. He added their outlook to his, and was grateful for the opportunity. When he realised that the Baron was but a broken-down gambler, questionably honest, it still had been a compliment that he had sought out young John Courtney, of Southampton, for friendship.

And Madame la Baronne, old, tired, worn with her life before the time had come for her to be worn, had a girl's smile lingering strangely amid the wrinkles round her eyes, and the light of scarce

quenched laughter in her brown eyes. Often, after that day when he had kissed Madame's hand and grown suddenly into manhood, whilst the Baron was venturing his, or hers, or John's, last louis on the green cloth, Madame would talk to him of the *petite*, still in her convent, would tell of her hopes that the religious life would be her happy lot, that the Sisters would keep her always with them.

It did not seem sad to the old gambler's wife that all the young days, and the full days, of her little one should be passed in the quiet of conventual walls; it seemed the happiest, the only happy, way. But to John Courtney, in the ignorance of his free Protestantism, it seemed hideous. He liked to hear Madame la Baronne talk of *la petite*, and often he thought he saw the young girl in the worn woman, whose hand he had kissed. He saw her behind convent walls, and was sorry for her, even then, before he had known her.

He remembered—the storm was rising and the heavens were heavy and overclouded, the sea heaved and the steamer rose and sank—but it was only the past he saw. He remembered meeting the Courvoisiers the next year, and again the next, at Spa, at Monte Carlo, at Wimereux. They had taught him to learn French, to learn people, to see cities, to leave off thinking that Southampton was the world; they had made a man of him. Always he talked to Madame whilst



Courvoisier played, always she talked of her *petite* Julie.

Then Madame died, and John it was who grieved. The Baron still played. John knew now that all the drama of his life had developed around these Courvoisiers. They had been his holidays; and *la petite*, though she had not been with them, was always of them, her babbling phrases repeated, her little letters handed round, her simple clothes made, and discussed, in whatever poor room Madame la Baronne sat and sewed and cooked.

Later on, the dying Baron in the Southampton lodging which John had taken for him, and the absurd claim on the Cavendish estate, became part of the drama, and belonged to the holiday. The old gambler died like a gentleman, however he may have lived. He was courteous to his nurse, grateful to John, complimentary to the doctor. When he suffered, no one heard him groan, when the death dew was on his forehead, he apologised for not being strong enough to wipe them off.

"*C'est fini,*" he said; "*la pauvre petite arrivera trop tard.*"

It was John who met her, when, indeed too late, she arrived in charge of a Sister. On that very quay, to which, notwithstanding storm and opposing wave, they were steaming so fast, he had stood to watch her coming; it was there he had first seen the little girl of whom he had talked so often.

But she was not little, only slender, and girlish, and oh ! so pretty, with those soft lips that quivered and those brown eyes that filled, and that sweet voice that asked him :

"C'est vous qui m'avez écrit ? Oh ! monsieur, you will tell me he is well, he is better—mon cher père !"

And both hands were outstretched to him, who had no good news to give her ; only sympathy, and even that in words stiff and difficult.

The days that followed he remembered. So little she had seen of her father, how could she grieve ? But without John Courtney, what was before her but grief, and lonely days ? With all her grace and sweetness, with all her youth and piquancy, the cheeks' soft curve and flush, the escaping curl and dimple, there was none but he to love or cherish her.

When he first heard the music of her laughter, he was already surfeited with the harsh guffaw of the provincial girls who flirted in the streets, and cast bold eyes at his long limbs, and hunted him openly, brazenly, through their empty days. His school friends had married from among girls like these, already stale with cheap kisses, flaunting their showy beauty, or their showy ugliness, husband hunters, shameless and similar. He had taken, perchance, a few kisses from those that were offered him ; he was no saint, only honest, giving little for little, and promising nothing.

The sweet of his life was yet to come to him. Unconsciously he was keeping himself free and fit to meet it. Julie Courvoisier, cast on his protection, for there was none but himself to cherish her, he knew, almost from the first moment he saw her, was that for which he had been waiting. It was too great for him, but it was for this he had waited. She came to him, pure from childhood, modest from instinct, she came safe from the grey conventual walls, fresh, a motherless thing, with a tear in her eye as the dew on a moss bud, rich at the core of her, but unopened, the green of her youth as a mantle about her.

And when there was talk of her going back to the convent, to sew, to teach, to learn patience, and grow old in learning, she had flung herself into his arms; no arms but his had held her.

When he reached this point in his remembrance the storm in his heart rose until the hurricane outside was as a summer breeze, the storm in his heart strained and shook him almost past endurance.

No arms but his had held her!

It was true then. Was it true now? Could he bear it, could he go on shutting it out? He was taking her home. Could he make a home in his arms again for her, seeing, as he saw now, always, and always more plainly, that yellow. Belgian, who lived, and smiled his cursed smile,

and rolled his cigarette with his stained fingers, and *knew what he knew* ?


The man who plays at being God, to a woman whom he still loves, not only with depth, but with passion, essays a *rôle* beyond human effort.

In Cabourg when John had heard about his little Julie from the men in the hotel omnibus, from the proprietor, from the letter she had left him, there seemed for him no alternative. She was his. He must go to her, save her, succour her.

In Paris, when she was ill, her life, even, in danger, and calling always to him, "John, my John," there was nothing but his great love, and his great fear, and his determination that he would forget, that she should forget, his insistence that all would be as before between them. He would wrest back the romance of his life ; those three weeks would spoil nothing. "*Tout connaitre, c'est tout pardonner,*" said John Courtney, and set himself to play God.

Already in Paris, twice or three times during her convalescence, an overwhelming horror, an overwhelming hatred, had seized him. But he had said to himself at Cabourg, sworn it in the train when he read and re-read her letter, that, beyond the gambling, the borrowed money, the hurried journey which he had interrupted, there was nothing to hold his thoughts.

In Cabourg he had said boldly to himself, "*And if there were,* it would make no difference."



In Paris, in anguish, he had cried, "*But of course it is impossible.*" When she pleaded to him he forgave her. Whatever she had done, he forgave her. There should not be one law for man, and another for woman. He reasoned it out, and that had been the conclusion to which he came. In safety and reassurance she had pillowed her head on his breast, relying on his promise.

To-night he had had his arms about her, carried her in them as she slept. And as he went down the steps to her cabin, her hair had fanned his cheek, he had felt her slenderness. When his manhood rose to her, the face of the Belgian stood out before him suddenly in the dusk, smiling. John's feet had stumbled, the storm rose wild in his heart.

Julie slept while John walked the deck all that wild night. Had he set himself an impossible task? For the first time he was shaken by a definite doubt of his capacity for what he had undertaken.

"Oh ! John, but you have not slept," she said, "you look pale ; oh, my poor John !" Her face was tender with sympathy.

"It has been a wild night. I've walked about. I am all right, the storm is over. We are in sight of the harbour. See, isn't that Marie waving ? Look !"

He was as bruised, as hurt, as sore, as a man must be who has fought all the night through with a strong, unconquerable enemy. But he

was not going to spoil his home-coming. He would have to get used to the new state of things.

He pointed out the children to her ; soon they were near enough to distinguish them.

"Oh ! my darlings, my little ones ! How are you, Jack ? How's Mummy's Génie ? They don't hear me. Oh ! John, shout, they'll hear you. Darling ! She is waving her little handkerchief, she is struggling to get away from Marie, to come to me. Go back, go back, wait, it is dangerous !" she cried out, although it was impossible they could hear her.



"John, *I can't wait*, I want my children."

She entreated him, with her tearful eyes, to hurry the steamer's slow progress. He laughed at her, telling her that in five minutes they would touch land, she must wait five minutes more.

The storm was over. The worst of storms has pauses, and deceitful presages of calm, even while it gathers itself for fresh violence.

It was a happy breakfast, with the bacon, and the eggs, and the English jam, and the excited children. Nothing could have happened. For here they all were together again, just as they had been before they left for Cabourg. She talked so continuously, just as she had always talked.

How beautifully Jane had cleaned the house, the new chintz was lovely ! How seldom things looked as well as you thought they would, but the chintz looked better. Even before breakfast she had



run from room to room, as a child runs, examining, touching, moving everything. John had bought new dining-room furniture, beautiful engravings for the walls, the nursery had been repapered with sanitary paper, and new oilcloth was on the floors. She ran backwards and forwards, exclaiming, thanking him. This was what he had looked forward to, he had had such pleasure in buying, and planning surprises for her. Now his heart felt like lead. When her inspection was over, and the joy of being once more at home overcame her, she must romp with her children. Of course, she had not forgotten how to skip, or to play cat's cradle, or to be a soldier, or a bear, or anything.

John reminded her, before he went off to the office, that she had been ill, that she ought not to over-fatigue herself. She was almost pettish, as she told him he was "*Vieux bonhomme*," she was quite well; she must play a little, she was so glad—so glad to be home. And then she hung her head a little, and paused in her gaiety. That quick flush he hated came to her, and her eyes were filled and wistful.

"Oh, go on playing," he said impatiently, and strode off. He was ashamed of himself. What on earth did he want or expect? Was she to mope, and repent, and be miserable? But again his heart contracted. What if he could never forget?

CHAPTER XI

BUT that which haunted him continued to haunt him, refusing persistently to be shaken off, it dogged his days, dragged the sleep from his nights, and robbed him of all rest.

Julie grew daily gayer, more free from her illness, from the weakness that had lingered. She and Génie were inseparable in work and play. Génie was learning to make beds, to sew, to cook, to chatter French. Jack had lessons with his mother, and began, against his will, to spell a little.

She flung herself into her household duties, and cares with such eagerness, and perhaps, gratitude, that every day was bright and beautiful with the sheer joy of its daily task. The *potage* that John liked best when she prepared it, the vegetables that were fried in butter, the little light cakes that the children called "mummy's air balls"; she made all these for him in that first week of her return. And then there were wardrobes to be overhauled, winter clothes to be prepared, and John's new socks to be com-

menced. She was busy from morning until evening with her housewifeliness. They had fruit for dinner, and home-made cake for lunch. On Tuesday all three of them, all three children, as he could not but deem them, tumbled out of the gate at once to meet him, and shout to him that the bills were less this week than before mummy came home, when they had everything the same every day! For it was on such homely lines the little house had always been conducted.

Was there something wistful in the looks she gave him, some dumb asking for praise, for assurance that now indeed she was forgiven, she was good again, everything was right between them? He hoped not, possibly, in his own dumb way, he prayed not. It was for her happiness he was fighting; he began to feel his own was gone for ever.

Her health, his health! What matter the excuse that came? He could not be a husband to her; his soul sickened, his body revolted, his spirit failed.

But all he could do, he did; more than most men could have done. He had not learnt the construction of the *rôle* he tried to play. He faltered for his cues, was stiff and awkward with his lines. He could not learn them. It is only God who can forgive.

The shadow of calamity hung over him all that time. His business always prospered. Tom

Jarvis's visit had been fruitful in work; there were mortgages to prepare, and new investments for which to look, a large business to wind up, a bankrupt estate to settle, rents to collect. The Jarvis interests were manifold. John neglected none of them, he worked well, it was only the sweetness of his home that had been poisoned, only his sleep that had been juggled with.

He lay awake whilst she slept, happily, by his side. In the shadows of the room lurked the sallow face, the hard black eyes, the perpetual smile. If her nightgown slipped, and the slender throat was exposed and John would put his hand up to cover her, to care for her, in momentary forgetfulness, in a love that had not died, the stained fingers were there before him, even there, and the satirical smile. John grew cold as he lay back, shuddering. The nights were full of horrors, of gibbering demons of jealousy, of hatred, of passionate revolt.

But in the morning, when she laughed and chattered, and the children chattered with her, and sang, and the window curtains and the flower boxes, and the rolled gravel path, and the latch of the gate closing behind him as he strode off to his office, were all that they had ever been, he shook off the phantoms of the night, kissed her, kissed them his good-bye, hoped, and always hoped, that one day the ghosts would be laid.

"John," said Julie one evening a few weeks

after their return, "I am going to have a dinner-party next week. It is time, is it not, we have a dinner-party? Whilst the chintzes are so new. We will ask Mrs. Malden, and your Aunt Sophia, and the Joneses; they must all come whilst the house looks so fresh. And I have a new dish, '*Petite demoiselle de Cabourg*,' it is called; it is really *homard*, hot in the shell, with a sauce, like sauce mousseline, but a flavour! Ah! mon Dieu! John, we must have the Travises too; it is he that has the palate. And his wife will be jealous, oh! how jealous she will be of my new dish!"

"Oh! yes, quite right. We owe the Joneses a dinner. You might add the Freshfields; it's a long time since we've had them. Don't overdo the strangeness of the menu. Don't forget there is such a thing as the roast beef of old England."

There they sat, the two of them, in the dining-room that overlooked the scrap of back garden. They had dined together, and Julie had been full of her day's news, of the price of vegetables, so high now that the weather was getting colder, of Jack's wonderful improvement in spelling, and the good exercise he had done, of Génie's talent, so extraordinary, for needlework, and the great secret that she was making a shaving tidy for his birthday. Having dined, and listened to it all, John was smoking his after-dinner pipe.

The curtains were drawn, the lamps lit. Cosy and homely the small room looked. It fitted the

class to which John Courtney belonged, the class that sit on in the room where they have eaten, and watch, undisturbed, their maidservant clear the table. On the walls were wonderful engravings after Sant, Luke Fildes, and Marcus Stone ; John had selected them. They all told stories, they were simple direct appeals to people who had no imagination. In the new bookcase there were complete editions of Hall Caine, Marie Corelli, and Guy Boothby. There was no attempt at art in the room, but it was respectable, safe, securely commonplace.

John sighed as he looked around him—a sigh that was almost content. Last night again the spectres had been about him ; but here, in this room, they were crowded out by commonplace. So Julie would give a dinner-party to their friends, to the people who lived as they did, relatives, neighbours, intimates, who, but for the Courvoisier element, had lived as John lived. It was well that they should do so, do everything they had been wont to do, that was the way to get back to where they had been, to restore what, had he been a woman, he would have called his nerves. For those it was which had been shaken, only those.

She had moved about the room to-night, in her old deft way that he had loved to watch ; it was so different from his own clumsiness. She had helped the maid to pile the dishes on the

tray, to fold the cloth. Now she came over to where he was sitting, dropped on to her favourite stool, and rested her head against his knee. The lamp's red shade met the red gleams of the fire and played with her hair; she was young and charming in that red twilight. There were still traces of fragility about her, he thought, a sharpness of outline, a delicacy of skin. It had always been Julie, not John, who was demonstrative; but, as she sat on the stool at his feet, resting her head against his knee, he was suddenly, strangely, sorry for her, he laid his hand on her dark hair.

"So you want to give a dinner-party?" was all he said. But she quickly responded to the tenderness in his voice, pulling his hand down, caressing it, putting her cheek against it.

"And then you will talk about the new golf club. Why have you not talked about the new golf club lately, nor asked your friends home, nor? . . . oh! John, John, everything has grown different!"

He left his hand with her.

"Give me time, dear, give me time," he said huskily. Then he resolutely put it aside.

"I've been too busy. Tom Jarvis left me no end of work. But you're right about the dinner, we mustn't let our friends feel neglected."

She knew then he would not talk about the past. It was to be silence, always silence. She wanted to forget, and to feel that he had for-

ness, symptoms of over-strain, he thought. It worried him ; her pale face came between him and his law-books. He was not carrying out his pledge—not honestly and completely. And, judging her by himself, he thought she saw what was lacking in him : spontaneity, the old freedom. She thought she noted that something always checked and stopped him, that something *was* between them, although he had said he *had* forgiven, and would forget. Her looks reproached him, although her words never did.

One evening, three days before the dinner-party, she did not even come to the gate to meet him. The children came alone, came with pale and frightened faces.

Mummie had been taken ill. She was in the kitchen, and Génie was with her, and there was a basket of mulberries, and some sugar in a pot over the fire, and suddenly she had called out, and Jane had caught her and laid her on the floor ; Génie had run for water, Marie had come.

"Génie cried," Jack said.

"Mummie's face was so white." Génie was quite ready to cry again.

"Marie said : '*Ce n'est rien, le feu est trop ardent. Maman a la migraine.* Run away, children.'"

"Jane said : 'She'll soon come round ; it's the 'eat of that there dratted stove.'"

"Jane said ; 'Blow her dinner-party ; as if I

couldn't cook good enough for the likes of any of them that's coming.'"

"She said she cooked for Aunt Sophia before mummie was so much as born."

All this was told John as he strode up the garden path, and they ran breathlessly at his heels. But Marie met him in the hall and reassured him.

It was nothing, nothing at all. Madame thought herself stronger than she was. She was trying some new dish of which she had read in a book; she had stood a long time over the fire. The kitchen was hot, and she had turned a little faint. Now Marie had put her to bed, and had made the room dark, and she was all right again. *Les enfants avaient peur, mais c'est rien, rien de tout.*

John went up. Julie lay in the darkened room, her face turned from him; he thought she was asleep. But he stood by the bedside a few minutes, and presently he noted that it shook; he became conscious, too, that she was crying. His poor little Julie! that was the way he had kept his pledges! In the heart of his conscience he felt her tears.

"So you've been ill," he said; "over-doing it. We shall have to stop this famous dinner-party after all. Feeling seedy still?"

"Oh! John; I'm so ill. . . . I'm so frightened." Her sobs shook the bed.

He sat down by her side. How small, how

frail, how young she looked ! He put his arms about her.

"So you were frightened?"

It was not what he wanted to say ; he wanted to tell her he was sorry, to ask if it was his coldness in which she grew cold and ill ; he wanted to promise that he would be different. But all he could find to say was : "So you were frightened. Well, buck up."

"The room went round, the kitchen got so dark, I did not know what was going to happen ; I thought I would die. Jane caught me."

"And now, do you feel all right now?"

He never suspected she was being disingenuous with him ; that she had cause for her fear, and that her appeal to his pity, too, had cause.

"Better, since you are holding me. But I don't think I'm quite strong yet, I feel tired, giddy." She wanted him to be sorry for her. Why didn't he kiss her as he used ? Did he, could he, suspect ?

"You mustn't get up to dinner. Lie still, and I'll bring you up some soup. I expect it's a touch of liver. When I've had something to eat I'll come up and talk to you. We mustn't have you ill again."

"They will have to go without the crystallised fruit on Wednesday."

"Well, as long as they don't go without the beef !"

"Oh ! John, my John ! what a trouble I am to you ! It would be better if I were dead."

She burst again into tears, but they were not like Julie's tears, facile and easy.

"What should I do without you ? You make my heart ache ; how have I failed, how am I failing ? For God's sake don't reproach me, I am trying, although the task is almost beyond me. I love you so, you are the heart of my life. But I see that fellow always !" . . .

These were the things John might have said, but his actual words were :

"Poor little woman, you take too much out of yourself ; I'll get a wash, and then go and fetch you your soup. Don't get hipped ; you'll be all right. If you will try these experiments I shall have to fit a gas cooking-stove up in the sitting-room for you. What do you think of that for an idea ?"

"Leave the door open whilst you dress," she called out to him. "I like to watch you."

But her head ached, and she felt sick and giddy when she tried to sit up.

She would not tell him this. When she could eat nothing, for even the sight of food nauseated her, and he suggested sending for a doctor, she would not hear of it. *He* was all she wanted ; that was what she told him. It was *he* who brought her the dinner she could not eat.

"I know that it will fall, that tray," she said,

and smiled at him. Because, though she was so pale, and could eat nothing, she smiled at him, he was moved inexpressibly. His awkwardness was an old joke between them ; although he was so big, and she so small, a tray, a toy, china, had always been safer in her hands than his.

“Come, it’s a long time since I’ve dropped anything.”

As if in illustration, the tray actually slipped, and the soup was spilt on the napkin. They both laughed. It began to seem as if the spectres were laid, as if old times were coming back, when they laughed together at John’s awkwardness. She made him smoke a pipe by her bedside. The smell of it did her good, she said. It seemed to him her eyes were strained, pathetic, as if she missed something, asked something, as if she were stricken as dumb as he.

That night she slept in his arms. Her gratitude and her clinging struck him anew. It was his love she had been missing, for the want of which she had been growing pale and heavy and frail. He vowed himself again to her in the watches of that night ; for he loved her, and his love must be great enough to blot out the past.



CHAPTER XII

JULIE was extraordinarily quiet and subdued during the next two days. John felt sure that the dinner-party was weighing on her mind. He threatened to send the whole thing in from a pastry-cook's—dinner and waiters and everything. That was what the Jacksons did, he said.

"Ah ! but their dinners are nasty."

She made a *moue* at his suggestion ; she tried to be bright. He did not know what ailed her. It was little effort to him to put the past away during those two or three days, for he was occupied, through all the hours he spent at home, in trying to rally and rouse her from the depression into which she had fallen.

Marie, too, said Madame would be better when the dinner-party was off her mind. John questioned Marie, but she was vague and unsatisfactory in her replies. He asked her how it would be to send for Dr. Jones without consulting her mistress. Perhaps she needed a tonic. Marie must give her a pint of champagne with her lunch, champagne always did her good. Marie

said, quite sensibly, there was no use in sending for a doctor until after the 11th. He might prescribe rest ; and how could Madame rest when she would see after every little detail herself, when she was so restless that, even for one hour, one little hour in the day, she would not lie down ?

Julie rested against John's knee in the evenings ; that was what she loved, she told him, what did her good. He succeeded for these few days in keeping memory at bay, keeping nothing in sight, but that Julie wanted tenderness and care, and that he was there to give it, and to keep his marriage vows.

Nothing warned him, or so he felt afterwards, when the blow fell.

The evening of the 11th arrived at last. In the drawing-room, John, in his country-made dress suit, Julie, in black, the scarlet poppies in her hair and on her breast accentuating the pallor of her cheeks, awaited their guests. Half-past seven was the hour, and punctually the rat-tat at the door announced the first arrival. Aunt Sophia's parlour-maid had been borrowed for the occasion, and Aunt Sophia was the first to come. Her house was not five minutes away, and the evening was fine. Therefore, whilst Marie disentangled her from her wraps and goloshes, a few moments elapsed before Aunt Sophia was displayed in the full splendour of her purple satin evening dress, with the *écru* lace trimmings and the fine *passementerie*.

Aunt Sophia was their nearest and most intimate relative. It was she with whom Julie had stayed before her marriage, when the old Baron had been buried and the Sister had returned to her convent, and John was waiting with all a lover's impatience, whilst the banns were being published. At first Aunt Sophia had disapproved ; the girl was too young, too foreign, and a Catholic. But there was a warm place in Aunt Sophia's heart for the nephew she had reared, her own sister's child.

"All right, Aunt Sophia ; if you won't help me through, I'll go round to Aunt Maria's," John had said, diplomatic for once.

She had been up in arms in an instant, had trotted round to Julie's lodgings, and let the girl win a quick way to that place beside John in her heart. She had mothered her, and been good to her, until the house was taken and almost furnished, the banns three times called, the honeymoon fairly started.

Aunt Sophia had put the house in order for them whilst they were away, and afterwards it she who helped the young bride through the first strangeness of her housekeeping. As her talents in that field developed, it was Aunt Sophia, no less than John, who became proud of them. She had been with Julie when both Génie and Jack were born. She had fought many battles with Marie over orange-flower water and peppermint, violet

powder and oatmeal powder, the proper time for short-coating, and the superiority of baths over basins for washing purposes. They were good fighting friends, she and Marie, Julie and the children being their battle-ground. No party was complete without Aunt Sophia. She had lent many things beside her parlourmaid, extra silver, and napery, kitchen utensils, and advice.

"Well, John ! What an age since I've seen you ! Not a moment to spare for your old aunt, I suppose ! Up to your neck in work ; the usual excuse, eh ?"

He submitted to be kissed. Julie embraced her warmly. Aunt Sophia admired the drawing-room, and said how nice the house looked ! She noticed Marie's new cap, "fiddle-faddle," but if it pleased Julie——

And Julie smiled affectionately at her, and defended the cap, and John said the children loved the long strings to play horses with. And then the Traverses were announced, and after that the Maldens, and, quickly in succession, the Smiths, and the Freshfields. With the entrance of Dr. Jones the party was complete.

They were all delighted to meet each other. There is no doubt Julie had the social instinct, and arranged her parties well. Long before the second entrée was reached, the talk was general. Everybody's holiday was being discussed at once, the advantages of Bognor over Southsea were

weighed and balanced for the hundredth time. Southport was commended, Cromer condemned, each from the point of view of some special landlady, or apartment, or local tradesman. The entertainment was going to be a success. The guests evidently liked their dinner, the new entrée was commented upon favourably. The table looked charming, Julie had decorated it with late roses and brown leaves, autumnal yet light.

But shortly after the new entrée had been served, any one who was noting the face of the hostess would have seen an alteration. She had been brave, and had resolutely put thought and fear from her, at least for this one evening. She would not give way, she would not believe what she knew. In some wild unexplained way, John would find out for himself what was amiss, would say he was not angry about it. She would tell him after to-night ; she would tell him her great fear, tell him, who had never failed her, who had said he had forgiven her, what it was that ailed her.

But the smell of the food, the effort to talk, were making her feel so faint again ! She must sit still, nobody must notice ; she must not spoil her dinner party.

Nobody noticed Julie's pallor, because Aunt Sophia, at the top of the table, was absorbed in explaining to Dr. Jones that her niece had seen after everything herself ; while John, entrenched behind the high specimen glasses and bowls of

flowers, was unable to catch a glimpse of the face that nevertheless dominated the scene for him. Therefore it was that Julie's struggle to disregard the familiar sensations that were assailing her, the nausea she was experiencing, passed unnoticed.

Before her, now, the room swayed, the conversation was as a rising and ebbing sea of noise, meaningless, inchoate, distant. Her friends, in their gay evening apparel, their smart dresses and jewellery, their evening spirits and satisfaction, grew dim, and faded, and failed. The table seemed as if it rocked. She made her struggle, her brave struggle. It was only when she began to think she was accomplishing her purpose, that she should, after all, succeed in keeping her seat and composure, that the collapse came. The table became a confusion of surprise and ejaculation. She had fainted dead away. Aunt Sophia was quickly by her side, John had taken her up in his arms, she was borne swiftly from the room.

Now she found herself on her own bed, in the quiet of her own bedroom. She had made a faint effort to detain John, to speak to him, but he had been persuaded to go back to his guests. He sent Dr. Jones up to her, and Aunt Sophia, too, remained, but John had gone.

The dinner-party, which was to have been such a distinct and conspicuous success, broke up almost immediately. John was unable, perhaps he was even unwilling, to keep together his

departing guests. He managed that they should finish their dessert ; he supplied them with good cigars. But, in truth, he was not sorry when, one after another, they insisted that, if Mrs. Courtney was ill, it was better the house should be left in quiet.

He walked up and down the little drawing-room, when, at last, he was alone ; and the spectres which had haunted him, the fear or trouble, which had been in the background of his mind, all these weeks, since his return from Paris, took now definite shape and form. His wife was ill ; her remorse had been, after all, greater than she could bear. His little Julie, whom he had left for three unguarded weeks in a foreign gambling-hell, who had emerged, he thought, he hoped, to the safety of her own home, had been wounded too bitterly, wounded perhaps unto death. *Perhaps unto death !* The words shook him ; he could not live without her, he knew that well enough. And he had not been good to her ! All these weeks there had been an estrangement between them ; all these weeks, in which he had sometimes hated, loathed, distrusted her, or himself ; all these weeks, when he had allowed that incident, of which he had decided not to think, nevertheless to thrust itself on him, and between them, she had been sinking under the burden of the remorse with which he had not credited her, of which, with all his strength, he had failed to relieve her.

The man was moved in all his depths as he walked up and down that narrow drawing-room, waiting to hear what the doctor should tell him. Fear for her shook him, and the love and the tenderness that he had for her gushed from the bitterness of his heart, and made it sweet again. If only Dr. Jones would come down, and tell him her illness was nothing, not heart failure, not decline, nothing organic, that it was a mere weakness, that these two faints she had had, these two attacks, only meant that she must rest, that she needed care, that she needed love, God helping him, he would give her both. All alone in that narrow drawing-room, he flung out his hands, and vowed again that he would give her all, everything. For, strangely enough, that was the shape his anxiety took, fears that her remorse and his coldness had sapped her constitution irrevocably! Of the blow that was to fall upon him, of what they would tell him, he had no prevision, made no preparation.

Aunt Sophia came down beaming; Dr. Jones came down, rubbing his hands, with that sly, furtive, congratulatory look in his eyes which every husband in Southampton knew so well. It said nothing to John Courtney. John's voice was very hoarse when he asked:

"Well, doctor, well! It's only weakness, I suppose? She's done too much—she takes everything so seriously—and she wanted to make a

show with this dinner. She has been overdoing it, I suppose ?”

And Dr. Jones laughed.

“Yes, yes, that’s about it,” he said ; “nothing to be alarmed at ; quite the usual thing, under the circumstances. Very early days, very early days to be giving dinner-parties, and standing on her feet all day to cook them. But she will come to harm, she will be a lot worse before she is better.” He chuckled, and John would have liked to strangle him. “A little *nux vomica*, and taking things easy, are all that she wants for the present. After eight years now ! Well, well, you are all alike, you husbands ; never satisfied when you are well off. I should have thought two children were all any man needed ; just a boy and a girl——”

“And to think she never said a word to me,” said Aunt Sophia, “never hinted at anything, and I have seen her every day since she came back from Paris. So that was the secret ! I suppose that’s why you did not come and see me, John ? She was afraid you would give it away. But that’s the sort of secret that must out, eh, doctor ? Well, I suppose you will want to go up to her ; Dr. Jones will see me to my door.”

“Wait a minute, wait a minute !” said poor John, staggering, leaning against the mantelpiece for support. “I do not quite understand. What is it you think is the matter with my wife ?”

“As if you didn’t know !” laughed Dr. Jones,

"I only hope it won't be twins, that's all the harm I wish you."

John had the strength to say nothing, the strength to let them both go, without realising what it was they had told him.

But, after that, his strength went, and it was as a weak, and not as a strong, man that he cursed the God that made him, and the trouble that had come upon him, that he was as one half paralysed, but feeling his impotent agony, and was unable for many hours to do more than look speechlessly at the cup that he must drain.

Of all that had haunted him, this thing had never been among his fears. He had forgiven her, he had set himself to forget, and it had been impossible to forget. But now it seemed to him that this was why they had mocked at him. Again he saw the spectres with which he had been confronted in the watches of the night, the demons of jealousy and hatred that had dogged his days. And now this new horror was upon him, this horror who would have the smile, the satirical smile, of that yellow Belgian, with his waxed moustache, and his black goatee, and his tobacco-stained fingers, who had stood under the chandelier, in that tawdry French hotel sitting-room, and had taken money from him, had taken money from him and had slunk away, smiling, leaving *this . . .*



CHAPTER XIII

FOR the first hour or two John was stunned, he was without coherent thought or power of reason. The servant came in and drew the blinds, and made up the fire. She glanced curiously at John, a huddled figure, staring into the flaming coals, murmuring to himself.

"*A cursed—cursed fool !*" she thought she heard him say. She could not know that it was of himself he was speaking. Marie came down presently ; perhaps she, knowing so much more than any one else, got nearer to the heart of the situation. Anyway, she left him undisturbed, and managed that the confusion of the dinner-party, of the dismantled house, should not approach the drawing-room, where he was left to sit, without question, by the dying fire, in the chilly evening far into the night.

But presently, finding his thoughts growing no clearer, his head no less confused, it seemed to him that it was the house which was stifling him, the house grown hateful, and holding. . . . Oh, God ! what was it that it held ?

He slammed the door behind him, he could not think clearly, but he knew what it was that the house held. He burst out crying like a woman, stumbling down the pathway, out of the gate, hurrying away from what dogged him. He walked fast, but it walked with him. And all the way he went he was crying, not as a man cries, but as a woman. This was the hour of his weakness, he was all undone, he could not face what had come upon him.

Past the harbour, near where the lights of the town grow dim among the shadows of moaning sea and moonless sky, he came back a little to himself. He had flung himself down on the stones of the beach, and now found himself shamed by his scalding eyes, and trembling limbs, and panting breath.

The smirking doctor, Aunt Sophia! What would they make of his words, his looks? But he had said nothing, surely he remembered he had said nothing.

What a cursed, cursed fool he had been, dreaming of playing Providence, playing God! He ought to have brought the children back from Cabourg to Southampton, and *left the wanton with her lover!*

And then he bit his lip through, as he thought of his Julie, and of such a word in such connection. He was weak again, the tears rained from him as if he had been a woman, burning him, for his heart

was full of her. The phrase had made his anguish molten.

Words, love words, and caresses, and the sweetness of his early married life, and her youth, and all he had had to be to her, came over him all at once; and he buried his face away from sky and sea, and writhed on the beach, biting into the very stones for anguish, praying for death. It was an unbearable trouble that had come upon him.

Once, once only, in his schoolboy days, he had been flogged by the Head; and it was an injustice. After the punishment was over, not a light one, he would have turned away, sullenly, silently. The Head had resented his sullenness, and his silence.

"Ah! you may sulk, John Courtney," he had said; "but you won't rub out what I've given you."

He felt again the bitter, impotent rage, the sense of personal pollution and degradation, the cruelty of the injustice he had not been able to fight, the additional insult of the words. To-night he felt again the burning and smart of the rod. But to-night it was in that exquisitely tender and sacred recess in his heart, where he had kept his sentiment for the Courvoisiers, and all that neared poetry in him, that he felt it. The consciousness of physical degradation was common to both punishments. It turned his heart to water.

"You may writhe, John Courtney, but you won't rub this out," he repeated to himself. His life was over. Strong and sane and healthy man though he was, he saw only a gleam of brightness on the coward's way—the way of suicide. He could not face what was before him, it was worse than death. He let himself dwell on the thought of suicide, as the night wore on to grey dawn and cold, as his reasoning powers grew numb and ever number, and only his pain was clear.

She would bear a child, it would be the child of the Belgian *croupier*. It was impossible for him to have any doubt or illusion, nor was it possible that she should have any. Then, in an uncontrollable spasm, it came to him that she must have known all the time how it was with her, that the *Sœur de Charité*, and the French doctor, Julie herself, all had been in the conspiracy to make a fool and cuckold of him. He could not bear it, no man could bear it. He must get out of it. He had been a fool not to see it at once, three months ago. He must clear out, a man must keep his own self-respect. When he had been made a cuckold, and a laughing stock, by a fellow like that Diderot—he could still see him smiling—there was only one thing to do, to clear out and leave it to them, to her and her lover !

Julie's lover !

How his head went down in anguish ! He

would get back to the house and cut his throat. He thought drearily that he was a strong fellow, and must cut deep. He would get back to the house, to the drawing-room, he need not go through the bedroom to it . . . he shuddered as he thought of seeing his wife, facing her, he could not go through a scene with Julie. He'd have to strop his razor well, to cut deep ; he would be glad to be out of it. A sense of relief came to him at the thought of being out of it, free from the pain that gnawed at him.

And because of that throb of relief, that prospect of deliverance, that one clean cut which would ease him, his mind took a leap forward.

There would be a scandal in the town. They would ask *why* had John Courtney cut his throat, honest John Courtney, whom they had known all their lives, whose accounts were in order, whose business was flourishing.

And the answer ? The answer would recoil upon her.

Well ! he was glad. With his pulses taking that sudden bound, a cruelty, a desire for her suffering, came to him. She deserved it, she had used him cruelly.

Poor Julie, poor little Julie ! the hardness towards her, the desire for her suffering, had not lasted through one beat of his generous heart. In that beat he saw her position, if he should choose the coward's way, and his own freedom !

It was enough for John Courtney to see that it was the coward's way, to know, in a sickening recoil from that bound of his pulse, that it was not the way for him. He had his place to hold, his work to do, his children to rear. Oh ! God ! how cruel it was, how *cruel* ! He would have to stay, and see it out. He couldn't shuffle off, like a cur, and leave her alone, and his children unprotected, getting out of his responsibilities because it was easier than facing them.

When he realised this the night was already far spent. He was wretchedly cold, and exhausted ; he got up from the stones, and slowly, weariedly, began to retrace his way homeward. Only the word was a travesty, a mockery.

He looked ten years older by the time he had regained his own door, his grey face was no longer young under his grey hair. It was a miserable face, the grief of the world was upon it. The very latch of the gate, the very sound of the gravel crunching under his feet, were laden with a thousand unbearable memories. It was there he had brought her as a bride ; through that gate they had carried the children to their christening. Later, they had run to meet him, and she had run to meet him.

CHAPTER XIV

DR. JONES, who was no wiser than the majority of country practitioners, having found Julie tearful, hysterical, with a rapid pulse, and symptoms of great agitation, had prescribed twelve grains of trional in addition to the *nux vomica* of which he had spoken, he had even administered it. The mild soporific had had its quick effect ; Julie had fallen into a troubled unconsciousness, and she did not wake to miss her John, until the gate had clicked familiarly behind him, and his lagging step was on the stairs. Then she called out :

“Is that you, John? John, I want you, quick!”

To her in that drowsy awakening, nothing had altered since the previous night, when she had slept in his arms. Whilst they were in Paris he had forgiven her and bade her forget ; she had been unhappy at times because she could not yet quite obey him, unhappy that this fear, possibility, certainty, which had come upon her gradually, would make it more difficult, harder, for them both. It had not entered her head, however,

to doubt that he would keep his word. Neither did she realise, nor had she even the capacity to realise, what he was going through. It was not her fault that she only loved, and never understood, his depths.

Now she had awoke in distress and discomfort, and it was her ten-year habit to cry to him in her need.

The drug, or her condition, or the fact that she had gone to bed too soon after her dinner, made her feel ill again and faint; or she had been awakened, perhaps, too suddenly, by the sound of his step, unwontedly heavy. She cried out to him.

Mechanically, with the grief of the world in his face, he went to her at the call.

"I'm so glad you've come, how late you are!"

The blinds were down, and the drug still held her, she could not see his face, and his lagging step might be the illusion of the sleeping draught, she was confused with it.

"Give me some water, dear; I'm thirsty and faint. My heart is beating so fast. I've been asleep, I think," she said, and closed her eyes again, whilst he went for the water. He had said nothing, but that was John's way.

"What time is it?" she asked, when he was there again. "I'm getting better, dear, don't be frightened; I'm sorry I called out, did I frighten you? I'm glad you came. I was so thirsty." John was holding the glass of water to her lips.

She had noticed nothing strange in his face, and it did not seem strange for him to be tending her ; he had done it for so many years.

"Thank you, you darling John !" she murmured, when she had drunk ; she was still betwixt sleep and consciousness.

"Lie down beside me. I'm cold when you are not there," she said drowsily.

She was asleep before he had answered.

How marvellous that she could sleep ! Had she but a kitten's soul, and not a woman's, that she could sleep on, let him tend her, then sleep again, carrying that secret about with her ! He stood watching her for a few moments after he had given her the water, and she had smiled at him, opening her brown eyes sleepily, letting the lids drop over them soon. And, as he stood, watching her in her sleep, the burden she was bearing became his, even as she was his ; what could he do ? a man cannot evade his responsibilities.

He turned drearily into his dressing-room ; the future was black before him. But he was tired out, he could think no more to-night.

"I'm cold when you're not there," she had said. Well ! he could lie by her side, it was no odds one way or another, he would have to go through with it. Whether her easy acceptance, her reliance upon him, made it easier was beside the question.

Anyway he was tired out. He undressed, he lay down beside her, and sleep mocked and jeered

at him. "You can't rub this out, John Courtney," was the burden of his uneasy dreams; his long limbs writhed in his sleep, his back ached, and he was degraded and suffering in his restless slumber.

"I must have caught cold; what a horrible night I've had!" was his first thought on waking the next morning; for his limbs were stiff, and his eyeballs ached, and he felt languid and depressed. By the time he had remembered, she was looking at him; her eyes were half afraid, half plaintive, but when she would have moved nearer to him, he turned his back, pretending to sleep again; he felt he must have time.

That trional had not been very good treatment. Julie had awoke with a nausea and headache, not very clear about what had happened the night before. Of John's late return, of her call to him, and his tending her, she remembered nothing. But gradually to her, too, the events of last night came back, with some shivering prescience, some doubt of his mood.

"John!"

Nothing was altered; it was not as if he had not known. He must not turn from her.

"John!"

She had only her woman's wiles.

"Why do you turn your back? I want to rest my head against your shoulder. It is not soft, your shoulder"—she laid a little kiss against it,

tenderly, because she had said it was not soft—"but it is restful to lay my head there."

She began to murmur against his ear.

"Oh! John! don't be angry with me, I can't bear it if you are angry. Be sorry for me still; it is no better for me, because now it is so bad for you. It is not that I have been wicked again. And, John, you said you forgave me, and that I must forget. John, last night you . . . kissed me, John; and the night before. That meant you had forgotten. And I was unhappy . . . all the time I was unhappy. I said, if it is this, this that I fear, he cannot forgive, or forget.' And then I say to myself, 'No! Julie, no, you must not be afraid; your John, he always keeps his word.' What he said did not mean only if, if nothing has happened he will forgive you. John knows what has happened; and he said, 'I forgive you . . . you are the light of my eyes.'"

"Oh! shut up."

He rolled out of bed, away from her voice, and her breath that was about him. He slammed the door of his dressing-room. His hand trembled when he set about shaving, he cut himself, and cursed his awkwardness.

The walls were thin in that jerry-built Southampton house. He heard Marie go to Julie, and he heard her tell Marie that her head ached, that she would not get up that morning. He heard the children enter, and exclaim that she was not

yet dressed, and begin to question her about the dinner-party.

Then came whispering, and the usual knock at his door. "No, they couldn't come in yet," he answered shortly.

But now there was Génie pleading to him through the door.

"May I give you your breakfast, Daddy, just this once? Mumsy's head is bad, and she cannot get up. I want to pour out your coffee instead. May I?"

And through the door he called back :

"Oh ! yes, anything you like. Leave me alone, can't you, while I'm shaving?"

"He said, 'Yes,' Mumsy, he said, 'Yes.' And I may pour out his breakfast, just as if I were grown up."

And he heard her dancing her joy lightly about the room. With what a web of little circumstance a man's life is bound about ! He did not know what to say to Julie, or how to say it. He finished shaving, and as he dressed he heard Julie talking :

"No, no ! Marie, they do not tire me, I love them here. Oh ! yes, Jack, of course there were some sweets saved for you, but no crackers. We don't have crackers for a grown-up party, only at Christmas, and this is not Christmas. Not for a long time, it won't be Christmas for a long time. Of course, I shall be better by then. Daddy will

make me better. He will come in and kiss me good-morning. He will put his hand on my forehead, like he did on yours, you remember, Génie, when you went out to tea, and ate something, and were so sick. You said it made you better when Daddy put his hand on your head. Ask him to put his hand on mine."

"Come in to Mumsy, Daddy, as soon as ever you've finished shavin' and dressin' and gettin' ready ;" the shrill voices piped at once.

"Oh, no ! no ! not now," she called them back from the dressing-room door. "Don't worry Daddy, don't fidget him. Your little hand will do, Jack, though it is so hot ; it's rather sticky, too."

Then the door of the dressing-room opened.

"Come along if you're coming," he said to Génie, striding through the room.

She would not entreat him, except with her eyes. He fumbled with the handle of the door impatiently.

"Come along," he said again to Génie. "I'm late this morning."

"John !"

Her eyes drew him.

"Can't you see I'm late ?"

"My head aches so."

She was entreating him only with her eyes.

"Well ! take care of yourself."

Irresolutely he stood there a moment, not looking at her.

"You haven't kissed her 'good-morning.' You haven't put your hand on her head, you haven't done 'nuffing,'" piped out Jack, who was on the bed beside her, whose eyes were large with wonder, that, seeing Mummy ill, Daddy was leaving her so unsympathetically.

He came back then, he put his hand on her forehead, awkwardly enough.

"My hand is shaky this morning. I think I caught cold last night. You'd better not get up at all to-day. You'll be all right if you lie still."

She caught his hand, and kissed it passionately.

"Oh ! John ! how good you are, how good !"

What could a man do ?

"That will do," he said gruffly ; "don't make a fuss."

But he stooped and kissed her, with the children staring at him.

"She's better now." "Is she better now ?" they piped in chorus. Her eyes, her cheek, were wet with tears.

"Remember the children are in the room, Julie."

"I know, I know," she still kept his hand against her cheek. "I am glad Génie may pour out your coffee. Don't forget, Génie, that he likes three lumps of sugar, and that you must not speak until he has read his paper."

"Not much paper for the this morning. It's a quarter to nine already."

"But you'll come back to me this evening? You'll come back."

"Where else should I go?"

He wanted to get away, out of it, he hated a scene. His words were impatient, his tone was rough; but he had put his hand on her forehead, he had kissed her. Her eyes were soft with gratitude.

"I am *stupid*, *stupid*, this morning. Where should you go?"

She put her arm about Jack on the bed and drew him closer to her.

"As if Daddy would leave his wife, his little ones alone, as if he would forget he loves us. Run along, Génie, be a little woman. Jack will stay with his Mumsy until it is time to go to the gate."

Génie poured out her father's coffee, as she had been told. She was a demure, sweet little maiden, with soft dark eyes like her mother's, and dainty echoing ways. The coffee-pot was too heavy for her. John watched, over his paper, how the colour flushed her cheek, how near tears were to her eyes, when "it would not lift!" He went round to help.

"Why didn't you ask me?" he said.

"Mumsy told me not to speak until you'd finished the paper," was the wondering answer. Had he not heard?

She was careful of his minor comforts, he said to himself, bitterly. He was filled with uncertainty

and indecision this morning, and the winnowing moments broke ground, now soft, now hard. All his points of view, in this trouble that beset him, were unstable and shifting.

Something was owing to his relations, to the family. Ought he to father this bastard, and rear it with his clean-bred sturdy children? He was only a burgher, of the middle classes, but he was not without his pride of race. There would be time enough, perhaps, when the child came, to think of that. Providence might so easily intervene on his behalf. There were such things as accidents; they were early days yet, and if it went on—why, even then it might not be born alive. And she was right, nothing had altered, she had not been wicked again! How he winced from the phrase. The world was so black about him that nothing seemed clear, not even the path of duty. But he realised that his forgiveness had been for the act, that the consequences he had not foreseen could not release him from his obligation.

That waiting time for John during the next few months may be imagined. Julie's physical condition made the consideration of his conduct towards her beyond argument. He *had* to be gentle, as affectionate as he could, to tell her again and again, as curtly, or as kindly as he was able, that he had not changed his mind, that he *had* forgiven her.

It did not need Aunt Sophia, nor Dr. Jones, to tell him that Julie was not bearing her burden well. Perhaps it was her recent illness, perhaps it was, after all, the love ingrained in her for him that took unconscious hurt from his hurt. Whatever the cause, the result was to depress her vitality. Every symptom of her condition was aggravated. Her face grew pitifully small and thin, and her languor, too, was pitiful. But always she told him she felt better, stronger, that she would soon be all right, that it was only the early months that were bad. Always she struggled, when he was there, to make light of her discomforts, to reassure him, to chatter, as of old, to be gay and bring smiles to his dull eyes and set mouth. She watched him wistfully; she could not refrain from the pleading that racked him. The tension between them was accentuated by his dumbness, and yet he tried hard to disguise from her what it was costing him. He felt things would be better if she would only leave him alone, and let things drift. Once, he went so far as to break a little through his reserve and ask Dr. Jones if something couldn't be done, if it couldn't be got rid of.

"As she was so ill," he finished, feebly enough.

Dr. Jones said, with immense surprise, that there was no possible excuse for such interference. He rallied John on his anxiety, and said this might be his first experience, instead of his third.

John turned abruptly on his heel ; what was the good of talking ? He could hardly bear her wistful, pleading eyes ; he could hardly bear to see her ill and suffering, and to know the cause. The man lived in hell. He had no rest by night or day ; his conflicting feelings tore and lacerated him. He was as one under the torture the Chinese have made their own. Drops of water, drops of vitriol, the victim never knowing which would fall. Her sweetness, her feebleness—his pity, his revolt burnt him continually.

There were times when he hated her. He could not, at these times, separate her from the man who had been her lover, the man who had mocked him in the tawdry sitting-room of the French hotel. What had occurred between them ? How was it——?

He had asked her nothing, questioned her not at all. Now, sometimes, a thousand agonies of curiosity tore at him, and he wanted to know how it had happened, what had happened. He saw pictures that nearly drove him from his balance. Had she, had she been, sweet to him ? It was maddening to think of it.

He could neither feel nor think delicately ; in hell, his thoughts were of the damned. The sweat broke out on his forehead, sometimes, when he was alone, and his hands would clench, as if for murder.

He shut himself up in his reserve, he felt him-

self cut off from brotherhood. His secret became like an iron mask, dividing him from humanity.

No one knew what ailed him ; his clients eyed him curiously, perhaps suspiciously. He felt, and could not protect himself, that he was being talked about, that presently his credit might suffer. Doggedly he went on from day to day.

In the beginning he had hoped she might miscarry, that some accident would put an end to the intolerable situation. Now all he could hope was that the child would be born dead, would die. . . .

It was easy for a baby to die. More than once a terrible thought assailed him.

CHAPTER XV

THE temptation of that assailing thought did not lessen as the days went on. He had never been an imaginative man, but as fever brings delirium, so did suffering bring him dreams.

His time for delicate thinking had passed. On the rack from morning until night, greyer and older, and ever more taciturn, that with which he lived seemed to become embodied in Julie's altered face and figure. What he saw was the spirit of the Belgian *croupier* fouling his home. He had impregnated the poor woman with his seed, and until she was free from it, she was all deformed and tainted, and gradually grew horrible to him.

He still loved her ; that is, he still knew that if ever the old Julie were restored to him, the old love would be there to greet her. But now, it was the other man who possessed her. The estrangement between them was very slow and gradual. Circumstances favoured his being able to keep his feelings partially hidden from her. As far as she was concerned, he had not much with

which to reproach himself. He saw that she had everything she needed ; he constantly assured her that he would keep all his promises ; he never now refused her a caress, or the words for which she asked.

Fortunately Tom Jarvis paid another flying visit to England ; this time his headquarters were in Liverpool, and John had to attend him there. During John's absence Aunt Sophia shared Julie's room, for it was not deemed well that she should be alone. When he returned, this arrangement still held good. John got a little peace this way. He kept out of his wife's sight as much as possible. For him, the air about her was tainted. Not by her, but by that which she carried. She missed him, perhaps less because she had much to occupy her ; she had little garments to look out and get ready, embroider, and air. Also she must be a little gay, making subtle efforts to conceal from Aunt Sophia, perhaps from Marie too, that all was not as it had been between her and her John. But there is no doubt she was nothing like as unhappy as he. She was full of hope for the future, and belief in his love for her ; and strangely enough, too, she was full of tender thought for what was coming.

John made pretence of working hard ; he went early from the house, came home late from the office, found excuse for business journeys, to Chatham, Rochester, London, remaining away

upon one pretext or another, now a week, now a fortnight, counting the hours. When it was once over he would feel differently, that was his only gleam of hope. It would not live, it could not live, the thing was too cruel ; it would be born dead. And when it was over he would feel differently, about her, about it, about everything.

Julie, because she wanted to conceal the extent of her sufferings, because she grieved for him, and wished to spare him, complained less and less at his separation from her, at nights, or when he went on his business journeys. She did not want to have to dissimulate, and yet she must perforce dissimulate while he was with her, so that he should not see how difficult movement was, and how persistent were her discomforts. She had never been so ill before ; she constantly thought how hard it was for John. She began to be almost glad when his grey face and dull eyes and set mouth were not there ; began to be glad just to lie about and sleep, when sleep was possible, without having to rouse herself to say "dear John" or "poor John," or try to find talk for him.

And when he looked on her, sleeping, with dishevelled hair, and face grown thin and yellow, moaning a little sometimes, his hands would clench, and a spasm contract his throat, and what he wanted to do would become clear to him, clear as the red dye of the sky at setting sun,

clear, as men see clearly when their eyes are bloodshot, and their hands prickly and hot with the desire to kill.

The Belgian was out of his reach, but his seed was here, and would soon burst into poisonous blossom. Julie would be released from that which was draining her life, this horrible tentacle thing that held her, and tortured her, but which must drop from her soon.

He did not always think in hyperbole. The whirlwind of his thoughts grew clear sometimes. *He would not father the bastard she would bear; nor should she mother it.* It poisoned the house. It was not only she who felt it; the children were ailing all that summer and winter. Possibly they missed the care that had always enwrapped them, Marie's and Julie's. But that was not the explanation which John's brooding gave him. He allowed himself to think that the air about them was tainted. Poor Julie, in bed, or on the sofa, breathed the corruption she had brought with her from that man, the contamination that was like a curse upon the house.

In his office John's brain acted normally; he could understand the abstrusest business details, master figures, give instructions for briefs to counsel; investigate, and decide upon, the titles of properties, assignments, leases, surveys. He conducted his life normally, went to church with

his children on Sundays, acknowledged his acquaintances, if briefly, yet adequately ; he even played golf. On the surface, he was the same John Courtney his friends had always known, only a trifle more taciturn, a great deal more difficult to talk to, just as good a fellow, if he were appealed to in the cause of charity or friendship, but more reserved, less, less sociable, they thought.

John's home had been all in all to him since he married, and now it was threatened. That is the way they read it, those surface-reading friends of John Courtney. They read that his wife had been ill whilst abroad, that she had had hardly time to recover. Perhaps John had been warned, and disregarded it, there is a certain brutal directness of thought, and even action, in the average husband ; and some of them thought that Julie Courtney's present condition might be the result of his disregard of medical advice.

There were those among John's friends who slapped him on the back, genially, and told him not to pull such a long face ; *she'd* be all right, never fear ! The percentage of accidents in such cases was less than one in a thousand ! There were some who rallied him about his dejection, and some who sympathised with it ; of course, there were none who could possibly fathom it.

John was not mad, but, under his taciturnity

beneath the burden he was bearing in silence, his moral balance shifted a little. He had never been an imaginative man, he had only seen the tangible things about him. They were all he had ever wanted to see. But now it seemed to him that there was coming to fruition, under his roof, a poison blossom or reptile, a living exhalation, miasmatic, foul and deadly. It was the only time he had had any difficulty in defining right and wrong. Of course it would die,—he believed in God and Providence, and a man cannot live even six months under torture without hope, without belief that it will cease. But if it should not die ? . . .

When that possibility closed upon him it was no longer easy to divide wrong from right.

If one has a snake in one's house, one ought to put one's heel upon it, stamp upon it. One ought not to wait until it rears its adder head, hisses, spits, and darts out its thin venomous tongue. John's little house, John's home, was full of the Belgian croupier, his cringing, his shifty eyes, his unclean crafty hands.

The endless months, in their slow malignant passing, showed each one darker than the last.

But at last the day of release came, the day of her delivery. It was all set about with commonplace ; both environment and circumstance were ordinary, of everyday occurrence.. On the surface, all that was going forward in that semi-detached villa in the Mayo Road, was that which went on

in thousands of other semi-detached villas in suburban residences in Southampton and elsewhere.

John went to his office as usual that morning. Aunt Sophia was staying in the house, and sent Génie down to tell him not to disturb his wife; she had had a bad night, and was now sleeping. Génie remained chattering to her father whilst he drank his coffee and ate his haddock.

"And how's Jack this morning? I haven't heard him stumping about. What's quieted him?"

"Oh! Jack's got a cold. He sneezed when he said 'good-night' to Mumsy last night, and she said he should have breakfast in bed."

"Well! that's a fine game, having breakfast in bed. No wonder he sneezed! And when are you going to follow his example?"

"I don't like having breakfast in bed; it gets all crumbly, and scratches you. I like coming down to breakfast with you. Mustn't I have breakfast with you to-morrow? Do say I may! Mumsy says I am to, if you want me to—but not if I fidget. I won't fidget, I promise; I didn't fidget that once, did I?"

"Well, well! we'll see about it when to-morrow comes. I'm too early for little girls—no time to get the porridge hot."

"I like bacon best."

"Bacon! do you? So do I."

"Then may we have it to-morrow?" the child asked eagerly.

"They call that special pleading in my part of the world."

John was less unlike his old self than usual this morning. To hear that he need not go upstairs, to ask Julie how she had slept, and kiss her, was so much relief for him. He ate his breakfast with more appetite because of that message.

Génie trotted down the path with him, Jack blew him a kiss from the nursery window; both children watched his long legs, his broad shoulders, until he was out of sight.

But Julie had known, even when that message was sent him, that her trouble was upon her. Aunt Sophia and Marie knew it too. Marie watched from the window until John was out of sight, and then sent Jane in all haste for Dr. Jones, and for the nurse whom they both secretly thought to be superfluous.

If Julie had sinned, the punishment was not withheld.

All day long she suffered, her frail body was torn with fruitless pain that came and went, taking ever with it some small portion of her strength and courage, some segment of her power of resistance. From dawn until twilight she was tortured, until the damp dews of utter exhaustion were on her brow, and it seemed not possible for one so to suffer, and yet live. They could not

help her ; they could only watch with her, and try to brace her spirits up to her great need. Her spirit did not fail until just the end, until the merciful drug, kept for her extremity, gave her oblivion in the last struggle of all. Through all that dreadful day, each interval of pain had heard her murmur weakly, and ever more weakly :

“Oh ! how glad I am John is not here. Don't let him know until it is over. *Pauvre* John ! how he would hate me to suffer so. Doctor ! will it soon be over now ? Don't send for John until the end. Auntie, don't tell him how bad I've been.”

And later :

“Am I going to die ? I don't think I can bear any more. I don't mind—I've been so happy always. Tell John I said I've been so happy always, and how I have loved him, that will comfort him.”

“Oh, you're not going to die ! Everything is going on quite well ; in another hour or so——”

That is what Dr. Jones said to her, and Aunt Sophia, Marie, and the nurse repeated it, continually, in reassuring accents. As the hours wore on, however, and Julie's pulse grew weaker and weaker, and grave symptoms appeared, they left off talking. They busied themselves about her, but their faces were pale, and big tears kept dropping down Aunt Sophia's nose, obscuring her spectacles ; and Marie grew noisy and nervous,

and insolent to the nurse, who alone was calm and unaffected.

At five o'clock Dr. Jones beckoned Marie out of the room. For an hour past, they had all been useless there.

"We must send for her husband," he said—and blew his nose.

"*Mais, elle me l'a défendu,*" said Marie quickly.

"Oh! yes, yes! In an ordinary case, of course. But we can't take the responsibility. There is"—and he gave some technical details.

"Madame is in danger?" questioned Marie, her apron to her eyes.

"Well! I won't go as far as that, but she's not doing very well. We had better send up to the office. Jane can go round to the surgery, and telephone to her husband. He ought to be here, you know. He won't lose his head; and at any moment"—

"Oh! sir; but if she will get better, she do so wish the master come not until it is over. She made me promise; again and again, she made me promise——"

"No, no! we can't risk it; we really can't. If you won't attend to it, you go back to her, and I'll call Mrs. Crawley out."

But Marie, although she was not ignorant of nature's ways with mothers, could not face the sick room again. She promised, instead, to do Dr. Jones's bidding, she was glad of the errand,

of the relief from responsibility. Fear lent lightness to her feet, she had arrived breathlessly at Dr. Jones's, asked his man to ring up John Courtney, and tell him to come home at once, and had returned to the house before the situation had changed.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN came in answer to that telephone message, he came slowly, reluctantly. He was not uneasy for his wife, notwithstanding the message; he hoped it would be over before he arrived, and that good news would meet him. "Good news" could mean only one thing to John Courtney; that there was no bastard in his house.

But there was no good news to await him. The next few hours did nothing towards adjusting that shifting which had taken place in his moral sense. From outside the door he heard Julie's cries, her moans, for now she was past self-restraint, and he heard the moans change to long-drawn sighs, and the sighs to a silence more desperate still. Dr. Jones came out of the room more than once, his face always graver. He asked for help at last, and John fetched another doctor. Still the hours crawled heavily on, and no change occurred. The hush of a terrible anxiety began to brood over the house. Aunt Sophia had no words of comfort left to her. The nurse, hurrying backwards and forwards, saw

John standing, all the evening, and far into the night, outside the bedroom door. He asked her no questions. If the knowledge of their fears had penetrated to him, he made no sign. The nurse was constrained to test his control by a word :

"She's very bad," she said in passing, and shook her lugubrious white-capped head. But it seemed as if he had not heard.

It seemed strange that he had no fear for her life, that he did not share their anxiety. For him there was only one fear, only one anxiety. He knew she must give birth to the monstrous thing she carried, but then, then it would be well with her. Vaguely realising their anxiety, it nevertheless seemed to him it must be because they did not know how necessary it was that the thing should die. If, as they suspected, as they told him, it was dead before its birth, then too it were well. The hour of her travail should be the hour of her freedom, and of his own.

The new doctor was for taking drastic measures. He was young in his profession, and restless. It was necessary to obtain John's permission, and to explain certain contingencies to him. Both doctors were jarred upon at hearing him laugh, a hoarse, unnatural laugh.

"Cut it in pieces," said John Courtney ; "tear it from her ; get rid of it." His eyes were blood-shot.

"Poor fellow!" said Dr. Jones.

"Cold-blooded brute, isn't he?" asked Dr. Gifford.

Twenty minutes later, a weak, familiar cry, a "*thank God*" from Aunt Sophia, "Ah! here it is at last," and a sigh of relief from Dr. Jones, startled the watcher at the door.

Aunt Sophia, weakened from her long day, her long night of tending and anxiety, came to him sobbing and unnerved.

"It's all right, dear boy; it's all right. Don't mind me, I'm only a foolish old woman. But they thought they would have to kill it, that all she had gone through was to be for nothing; the prospect of her disappointment upset me." Aunt Sophia broke down and sobbed, the hard, painful sobs of one no longer young.

Her fortitude had been terribly tried, but when she had drunk the wine he brought her she could note his face; it looked like the face of an old man, and his eyes were red. She gulped the wine and her tears down together, then she went on talking to remove that expression from his face:

"Don't look like that, John; it's all right now, she will soon pull round, there was nothing really wrong."

It was not dead then, this reptile; that was all he knew, although he had done what was expected of him, had fetched wine for Aunt Sophia, and

made her lie down on the bed in his dressing-room.

She said "there was nothing really wrong"—that was what Aunt Sophia said. But what if she had known?

Aunt Sophia went on talking:

"What time is it now? Six o'clock! Thirty-six hours! For she was ill all last night too, although she would not let you know. It's a little girl, I do wonder what the children will say to it, a dear little girl. I'll bring it to show you as soon as I can, but it hasn't cried properly yet, and they are busy with her. Poor Julie! what a time she has had, what a dreadful time! And the sweetness and unselfishness of her! She thought of you all the while. It was, 'I'm glad John does not know,' and 'Don't send for John until it is all over.' And 'Aren't you tired standing, auntie? . . . Send Marie away, she is getting so unhappy.' There, John, I was against you marrying a papist, but——"

"Will you come in now for a minute? She is calling out for you."

Dr. Jones was no longer grave, but consequential. He was as proud of what nature had suddenly and unexpectedly accomplished, as if he had been the organiser of the forces called into play.

"I need scarcely remind you to disturb her as little as possible. Don't stay more than five

minutes. She is really not quite conscious ; we had to give her a large quantity of chloroform. But Dr. Gifford thinks it better not to baulk her, and she is asking for you."

John passed into the quiet of the sick room, into the familiar scene. All the past months were nightmare phantoms. He knelt again, as he had knelt by her bedside in the French hotel, when he had thanked God passionately that he was there, when he had prayed for her life. Then he would have forgiven everything, forgotten everything, only praying that her life should be spared.

He had not fulfilled his vows ; a dull remorse overtook him.

"Is it John ?" she said.

Her voice was weak, thin, far away.

"Have you seen it ?"

She moved the bedclothes ; something flannel-covered and tiny, breathed by her side. He could not speak ; but she did not wait for that, her mind was wandering.

"Poor little '*Baccarat*,' I thought it was going to mean the end of everything, the end of me."

"You ought not to talk." His voice was harsh with his emotion. But her delirium took heed of neither voice nor words.

"It is all gone—all the money, John—everything you gave me. I don't know what happened last night ; I only know I suffered. It was not

you, my husband. Oh ! *le cauchemar* ! I had drunk so much champagne. It was always '*Huit à la Banque, Neuf à la banque*,' and the sinking of the heart, and the fear, and '*baccarat*.' It has come alive now—'*Baccarat* !' "

Feebly she tried to turn her face to the bundle of flannel that stirred and breathed a weak perpetual cry.

"Poor little '*Baccarat*' ; but it does not look like two tens !"

Her mind was wandering, her eyes were bright with fever.

"Take it away from me, John. I can't sleep . . . you are cruel to leave it there."

Her thin voice rose, and from the other end of the room, the doctor, the nurse, hurried to her. The doctor put his finger on her pulse. Her eyes were growing more glazed, and her feverish voice talked faster and more incoherently.

"The temperature is rising," Dr. Jones said. "I think you had better go out of the room ; she does not know you. She has been through a great deal, we are going to give her a sleeping draught, she must have absolute quiet."

John was quite hopeless now, quite ; the weak crying of the bundle that lay at her side moved him to nothing but disgust.

"Can't you send it into another room ?" he asked.

"Put it in the cot, nurse," was the careless

answer. "It had better have a hot-water bottle ; the circulation is not good yet."

"I should think it would be better out of the room," John urged ; but no one heeded him. It is natural to leave a new-born baby with its mother. All the time, the incoherent babbling went on, as it had done in the French hotel. The weak cry of the infant, as it was removed from the warm bed, mingled with the confusion of the lingering chloroform fumes.

"It's a knave. . . . *Baccarat*, always *baccarat*. I hear it like a cry. Do you hear it, John ? And it means ruin, ruin. What will John say ? . . . I did not know it was a baby ; why do you let it cry ? . . . I can't sleep ; always I see the cards."

"Of course, if it disturbs her, it must go. Isn't there a nursery ? Put a blanket over the cot, and carry it into the nursery," ordered Dr. Gifford impatiently.

But John couldn't touch it, for the life of him he could not touch it. He stood there, quite helplessly. "Just like a man," as the nurse said to herself, contemptuously, when, though her hands were full enough already, she had to lift the baby out of Julie's bed, and put it, all covered up in blankets, on to a hot-water bottle, in its own cradle.

There were a few more days of comparative anxiety, most of them due to Dr. Gifford, who, being very scientific, and only recently from hospital work, foresaw complications that never

arose, and essayed for them the new remedies that set up legitimate, but nevertheless vexatious, discomforts. Both the doctors were delighted with the new remedies, they proved most interesting experiments, and the patient was ultimately little the worse. As Julie never knew to what was due her inability to nurse her child, and the various delays in her convalescence, she was very grateful to her medical attendants, very obedient and sweet-tempered.

It was astonishing how quickly the routine of the house fell into its remembered order. The monthly nurse and the new baby monopolised Julie and her bedroom. Marie was insolent and noisy and sullen at being excluded, the children were constantly naughty under her provocation and example, Jane was idle and quarrelsome, John ill-attended and neglected, just as it had always been when Julie was upstairs.

John visited his wife regularly. He took no notice of the baby; but this was not surprising, seeing how nearly it had cost him his wife, they said.

"I should let this finish it, if I were you," said Dr. Jones, in his facetious way. "Three is a nice number, and it was touch and go this time. I may tell you that much—touch and go."

John shook him off, with his assiduity and facetiousness. It did not seem that John Courtney improved very rapidly in amiability, even now

that his anxiety was at an end. Men still shrugged their shoulders about him ; it was well for him, he knew, that he did not want credit.

Of course Julie was very ill for a few days, drugged scientifically, taken out of the hands of nature. But this only retarded, and did not prevent her convalescence. John saw her night and morning. He saw her eyes grow soft and beautiful again, her complexion clear, her sweet dimpling smile return to her wan cheek. Spasms of thanksgiving came to him in those hurried visits to the sick room, and warm gushes of love, bringing with them some healing to him, too.

There were times when he forgot to argue with himself about right and wrong, times when he forgot the baby, and only felt vaguely that his wife had been, in some strange way, restored to him. The taint had passed from her, and here she was again, his own, purified. You could not see her eyes and skin and doubt it, so clear and beautiful they were. There was no blemish nor stain upon her. His heart was all soft to her again, as he sat beside her and listened while she talked, sometimes hearing the voice only, not the words, the musical babble that dulled his ears and senses, and kept him from arguing the right or the wrong of his tacit acceptance of the new occupant of his home,

It was doing no harm as yet. As Julie got better,

and her influence re-asserted itself, the children grew once more bright and amiable. Marie was bribed with the tending of the new baby, the nurse was dismissed, Jane was coaxed again into decent cooking.

His forgiveness of her now, at least, was full and complete. She was sanctified to him through her suffering, and very dear, his morning and evening visits to the sick room were no longer a burden, the set lines around his mouth relaxed, his eyes grew almost tender. When he was with his children, he laughed sometimes. They had not heard him laugh for months.

Now, as he walked up the pathway and lifted the latch of the little gate, it seemed once again towards home that he was coming. He did not stay to question why it was so with him, but so it was. The white window curtains, the scarlet geraniums in the green boxes, the bright brass knocker, were again beacons to him, showing him the way to happiness.

Because he worked so well, and still so hard, because he was out of the house before nine in the morning, and did not return to it until after six, he did not know of the little festivals that went on, in the bedroom and in the day nursery, when the children would cluster around, half in doubt, half in wonder, to see the new little sister that lay on Aunt Sophia's lap, or was cradled in Marie's arms, or was lent sometimes for a won-

derful five minutes to Génie to hold, as if it were her own—a new doll, that opened its eyes, and clenched and unclenched its little fists, and was altogether exciting and marvellous. Jane, too, would leave her kitchen to partake in those festivals of baby-worship. She, too, would lay tributes of shoes, knitted by herself, on the altar they had all silently erected to the infant, to infancy. Some instinct kept Julie silent to John about the new baby, which had already found its strange sudden way to her heart. No matter from whose hands the gift had come, its helplessness, its soft unconscious nestling, the down on its little head, the mysteries of pathetic movements and expression, found her, made her, mother to it. She was of the many women who love all babies. She loved the scent of new flannel and powder that hangs about them, the lightness of them when they nestle in motherly arms, snuggle down against a motherly breast, smile, sometimes, that unconscious smile which they bring with them, straight from heaven, to tempt mothers to sudden kisses and love words.

The downy hair on the new baby's head was as fair as Génie's had been. The blue eyes were the colour that Génie's had been, Jack's too. And it was so many years since she had held a baby of her own in her arms! She thrilled to it with passionate motherly love, she put away from her

mind, from her thoughts, all of its coming that was unsanctified, unholy. Instinct, not memory or reason, made her hide this love from John; but she hoped quite strongly that that would not long be necessary. The carnival of love was never quite complete without him. She yearned for his sympathy, she framed speeches to utter which she had not yet found the courage. She wanted to see the baby cradled in John's arms, as the others had been; she wanted him to see the love that it had brought in its train. She was no logician, this mother Julie, she did not see that it was the moon for which she cried. But while it failed to come to her, the days were nevertheless full of joys.

It is difficult to understand what there is to worship in an atom of human flesh, mindless, vacant, irresponsible; but there it is. Babies bring this possibility of an orgie of love with them, it is the atmosphere in which they come to consciousness. They smile into their mother's eyes one day, realising her, and after that they grow.

John, coming in one day unexpectedly early, surprised this scene. It was the tenth anniversary of their wedding-day. Perhaps that was the reason of John's early return. Julie sat on a low chair before the fire, in a white flannel dressing-gown, very soft and light; the front was unfastened, and her breast was exposed,

the young, round breast of her, so firm and small and beautiful, her face was illuminated with the light that shines only on the face of the Eternal Mother. The baby's head was on her breast, the little soft cheek indented it; under her arm she had a bottle, and the tube from it was in the infant's mouth. Although the light was on her face, there were tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Suck, darling! suck, sweet! Oh! Marie, she thinks it is me."

Julie had given to the other children from herself, but for this one the mother-food had been withheld. "She will never know the difference, Marie, dear. I am so glad I thought of holding the bottle so; then I feel her sucking. See! how hungry she is for it. I shall feed her this way every day."

The happy tears rolled down her cheeks. As she had grown stronger, she had fretted at her inability to still the hungry cries of this one, as she had that of the others. But now she had found a way to play, to pretend, that she fed it, and, as it sucked, content, its downy head against her breast, the tears of happiness rolled down her cheeks. So John saw her, with the child against her breast.

Then, by the blood before his eyes, and the sudden passion that shook him, by the pain that tore him like a living thing, he knew that that

which had been sleeping was awake, that he could not forget it was not *his* child that she held, that the torture of jealousy, like a knife in his heart, would never die whilst the other man's child lived, and lay on her heart.



CHAPTER XVII

SHE had not seen him open the door. Absorbed in the child at her breast, she had not noticed that he stood there, watching, or, perhaps, she would have called to him. She would have found the courage to ask his love, his protection for the helpless atom in her arms ; perhaps he would have found the words to convince her that what she asked he could not give. All that is certain, however, is that he closed the door quietly behind him, shutting out the picture, the low nursing-chair, the firelight, and the happy tears on her transfigured face.

She heard the slam of the house-door behind him ; she wondered idly for a moment who had gone out. But the bottle was empty, and she had to argue with Marie over its refilling, the bib had to be adjusted, the question of cradle or lap for a sleeping baby debated. Who it was that went out, and slammed the street door, was of minor importance. Nobody called to him, "Is that you, John ? I want you, John." He could go his own way.

His own way took him where it had taken him that other night, the night when first he learnt what was coming to share his home. Even then he had not suspected that it was her love, too, which he must share with it, on which it would encroach.

There was not room in that little house for him as well as for the child! That was what he felt, when the door slammed behind him, when she had not called him into the warmth of the room.

It had been winter before, it was spring now; but the dusk warm air of May was worse to him than the chill of autumn. It stifled him, he could not breathe until he was again by the sea.

He stood alone on the shore in the dusk of the spring evening; the sea broke at his feet, the grey sky had the last red flush of the sunken sun. Against the stones the incoming tide murmured, and rolled toward him with soothing monotony, quieting him gradually. His solitude was complete. He had shut the door of his wife's room behind him; but it was her room and the babe on her knee, that he saw more plainly than sea or sky, her room, in which now there was no place for him. He was not eloquent, even to himself.

He must get out of it, there were things no man could stand, he must go right away, were all the phrases that shaped.

It would be so simple, such an easy solution,

and he was so dead sick of it all. Things would never get better, but worse. For if, already, in her arms, that bastard edged him out, later it would be his children too that it would exclude. And he would have to stand back, and impotently watch this !

He did not realise that the name of his slow sullen rage was jealousy, or that at the back of it was his fresh springing love for her, that had ebbed, but that now flowed overwhelmingly. If it were dammed suddenly by this attack of jealousy, there was danger in the sudden damming. No one could say in what direction this pent-up feeling of his might find its vent.

Now it was like a pressure on his brain, it prevented him thinking. He only knew he had suffered past endurance, and that the sea soothed him, and called him.


He had gone home early, because it was the anniversary of their wedding-day. Always before they had made together a little happy festival of the date. The hideous difference notwithstanding, he had gone home. The last few days he had been feeling happier. He had not known why, but, in that quickening of his pulses, and little flush of his flesh, he realised now it was because his wife was restored to him. He wanted her, his whole manhood cried to him that she was his necessity. But he was no longer hers !

It was a sudden unreasoning burst of jealousy that had driven him from the room, where she sat with the baby on her lap, and neither saw nor called to him. He grew calmer as the waves broke at his feet, there was a sympathetic melancholy in their monotonous break.

He was no good, he was nothing but an awkward fool. What was the good of him? He couldn't even tell her what it had all meant to him. But he would not, if he could. He was not going whining to her for her love. What was there in him for any woman to care about? Other fellows had grace of speech, and ways of woman-wooing, but he was a dumb dog.

She didn't want him, he saw that plainly enough. He was best out of it. He had thought of that before, but there had always been hope. If the thing had not lived she would have come back to him. Now, she would never come back. She would nurse it, and dress it, and feed it. . . . Again his rage of jealousy turned sullen with remembrances. He would get out of it all.

He would not go home, and cut his throat, and make a fuss. He could undress on the beach, as he had done a hundred times before, in his boyhood, even in his early manhood, and go for a swim; there would be nothing in that. He would swim, and swim, and if the tide carried him beyond his strength, if he swam on and on until his powers failed him, and there was no return for him, why,



it would be only an accident, and nobody would care or inquire deep. What reason had he to commit suicide ? So far as the world knew, none. His devotion to his wife was an open secret, his accounts were in order, his business was flourishing.

This time, somehow, it did not seem a cowardly thing to do, she would be well provided for, if his death were proved to be an accident the insurance money would be safe. She would not miss him, she had the baby. She had not even heard his step, although always before she had called out to him.

Because jealousy, as John suffered it then, is such a conflicting passion, in the very breath that he said she would not miss him, he knew she would. Well, it served her right ! Hurriedly he began to undress, to take off his coat and waistcoat, to fold them up as if he would return for them, to commence his preparation for the long, endless swim that he would take. He was only in the way. Julie would do quite well without him.

The water was cold, the tide incoming. Under the thin, grey, cloudy sky, light and broken, he went out to meet it. It reached his ankles, his knees, then he took his header and struck out.

How it buoyed him up, that cold salt water, cooling his hot head, relieving the pressure, or seeming to shift it ! In the first breaker through which he dived, his purpose was lost. Now it was only a swim he was taking. He revelled in his

strength as he breasted the waves, and rose with them, striking out, and always out. They were strong waves, high and rolling ; he had to fight his way. It was like a foe he was buffeting, for the tide came rough and broken. It made a man of him again ; out, and ever out, he swam, up and down, with the rise and fall of the waves, the salt keen spray on his lips, the wind in his teeth. "Sea, and bright wind, and heaven of ardent air"—he felt these as vitally as the poet had felt them, though he was no poet.

He had been a fool to think of drowning, a man like himself could not drown. By the impact of the waves, by his joy in surmounting them, the triumph on the crest, the calm in the slough, he knew that he must live. It was death he had gone out to meet ; now he was facing life. His life was given him to keep, his very gift of strength proclaimed it.

The cuckoo in his nest, the snake on his hearth, the stone that was in his way, those must go, not he, so a man keeps his manhood. His head was growing heavy again ; the waves were mountain high.

A man should meet his troubles, not run from them. If, indeed, that bastard in her arms edged out his children, who but himself was there to protect them ? What right had he to go and leave that behind him to share what he had earned for those of his own flesh and blood !

If he was buffeted, he was strong ; see how he struck out—though the foam was in his face, and the wind in his teeth. It was for that he had been given strength. Right and wrong might be mixed in his mind, but the voice of nature was clear. Fight ! that was what it said ; fight, for a man's rights, for his home, for his wife ! Strike out of the way anything that barred him from them !

Mechanically now his arms were moving, but he was making no progress ; his ears were full of the sea, and his eyes were closed with the salt rheum ; the waves swung him, and flung him, and played with him as they listed. His strength had all left him ; he combated no more with the tide, but let it carry him back to life and to purpose, to a man's purpose. Strange how everything had gone black, and he could see nothing, hear nothing, but the sea in his ears, whispering, talking, directing him, he could not see where, and he could not understand the direction. Now he came to the surface again, saw stars in the dark sky ; but again the waves had engulfed him.

Strange they should fling him back into the room where his wife lay, into that warm firelit room ; but now he made out what they said, what they told him he must do. *A man should hold his own, must reach to it over obstacles, must act, if needs be, the man's part.* That was why the waves had flung him into his wife's room, where

she lay, with the baby, that was not his, in the cradle beside her. "*Go on, go on,*" they cried ; "*your way is plain.*"

The waves had swung him and flung him as they listed.

In Julie's room the firelight had burned low, and the night-light glimmered feebly. She breathed sweetly and low in her sleep. But he must not look at Julie. Yet how well he saw her, her dark hair and the nightgown open at the throat, and the white neck of her !

What had the stars to do with it ? Who said he was drowning ? Surely he was in the room, in his wife's room, where he had ever gone, like a man. But now the unwonted cold of fear was in his limbs. What had he come here to do, what was the roar in his ears ? "*Seize it ; strangle it ; get it out of your way : be a man, John Courtney : hold your own !*" were the words he heard.

Again he saw the white streak of moon on the face of the stormy waters, and the stars looked down upon him. There was a rush of waters in his ears.

No, that must be Julie's breathing, and the quick beat of his heart, or perhaps it was the ticking of the clock, marking the time for him. He must make haste, he had so little time, he was not drowning, but he had so little time. He had seen her hushing her baby to sleep, holding it, swaying with it to and fro, just as the waves will

sway a tired swimmer. *The croupier's baby lay on his wife's breast, and there was no place in her bed for him. He must take it from her. A man must fight for his own.* That was the answer of the cold sea, the answer that had come to him out of the silver calm of the heavens.

The cradle lay in shadow, and the cradle was rocking with the rise and fall of waves. How cold it was, and the salt in his mouth was the savour of death !


The cot swung now high, now low, in the shadows of the room ; he tore aside the muslin curtains with his stiffening fingers. He had pulled aside the curtain, but he could not see its face, the flannel was round it, John knew the cradle care of mothers. Beneath the enveloping flannel he must go to find the little face. The one he saw was Génie's, or Jack's ? A red and shapeless little face, the fair hair moist, a crumpled fist in a shapeless mouth, sucking in sleep. What he must do was to press the flannel back in its place, fold and double fold it. The face would pucker up for tears when he had drawn aside the flannel, it was the cold that touched it. He had seen them do that. Well ! it should be warm, he did not want to hurt it. But he did not want it in his house. He was cold, but surely burning sweat drops stood on his forehead, his hands were palsied. The baby stirred, and he folded the flannel close, and pressed

it over nose and mouth. A moaning sound came from it ; or was it the sea in his ears ? He pressed and pressed, and now there was no movement, only silence in the room, and the clock was ticking, and still the cold. How numbed he felt, but he was glad it was over, he could die now, he needn't struggle any more, there was no bastard in his house !

Again he saw the stars, and the pale glimmer of the moon. What more did they want with him ? He had used his strength, he was tired now, and the croupier's baby was dead. All the time he had wished it dead, but a man must fight to hold his own. Wind and wave beat upon John Courtney, watery moon and grey sky shone upon him ; they had separated mind from body. He had turned upon his back when exhaustion had come suddenly upon him ; he knew what a drowning man should do. Nothing mattered, he had fought his fight, his home was cleansed.

But the tide dealt tenderly, ironically, with him. It drifted him back, flung him on the stones again, right on to the neat heap of his folded clothes.

And as he lay there, the strength with which he had been so lavish came slowly back, and his mind from out the silent room, from beside the strangled baby, came back more slowly still to his shuddering body. But the taste of brine that was like death was still in his mouth when he



came to himself, and the fear that had been upon him gripped him still.

The dream had been vivid ; was it dream or illusion ? He heard cries, Julie's and the babe's. They cried to him. His teeth were chattering, and his lips were blue. All the time he was dressing on the beach, a mile and more from his home, he heard those two cry, their voices mingled.

When he had dressed, he set off running. Presently, as he ran, his senses came back to him. He had had a narrow escape. He realised what had happened ; but if the incoming tide had been the outgoing tide, that long swim had been his last.

Oh ! how good it was to be alive ! He remembered the rage of his jealousy, how small it seemed. He was a long way from home, he had been out too many hours. His strength was coming back as he ran, and the warmth to his limbs. Strange how he still heard that cry in his ears. Of course it was an illusion ! He had been near to death, and his mind was not yet one with his body.

Illusion or instinct, he quickened his pace.

Before he had reached the corner of the street, before he had got in sight of the house, he knew something had happened, that something was wrong in that little house. His mind was cleared as if by a lightning flash. And on the wings of

the wind, as he ran, travelled a voice, calling to him. It was Julie's voice.

"John, John!" it wailed; and he ran, and ran, as if again death pursued him.

No! it was not fancy. Now indeed his blood ran cold as he sped. Out of the night, her voice called to him, and many voices reached him, and the smell of smoke, and a crackling sound—how he ran!

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" he sent his panting breath on before him.

And she heard it, she always said afterwards that she had heard it.

CHAPTER XVIII

BEFORE the little house an excited crowd surged, and shouted all kinds of contradictory directions. Already a hand engine had been brought up, a short ladder rested, impotently, against the dining-room window, and an adventurous amateur fireman stretched helpless arms towards where Julie was. Dimly John divined that her children were clinging to her ; for it was in the night nursery she stood.

"John !" she cried, "John !"

The call was as wings to his feet.

"Don't jump, I'm coming ; don't jump."

It was almost impossible that she could have heard him, but, as he dashed up the pathway, scattering the neighbours, who made way for him, as he seized and shook the ladder, shouting to the man upon it, to come down, she saw him.

"We are all right, *n'aie pas peur*, John !" she shouted to him. "It is only the smoke."

John knew what it was in a moment, almost before he had got in sight of the house. He had been warned, and had warned them. It was

the copper, which they used to wash clothes at home. This was heated by gas, and every night he or Julie would go down to see that it was turned low. But to-night he had not gone down. He had rushed from the house, nursing his grievances, arguing his wrongs, dreaming of revenge. Here, then, was his revenge, up there amid the smoke ; but as yet he only suspected it. He saw that the smoke was thickest, not where she stood, but on the other side. Already from beneath the chintz-covered, pretty drawing-room, a little flame leaped up. John knew what to do ; he seized the ladder, sending his voice again before him.

“Hold tight, I’ll be up in a jiffy, there is no danger.”

It was to the back he must carry the ladder ; for back and front the little house was accessible. The danger was really not great, although already the dark night, and the belching smoke, and the confusion tended to obscure the judgment. Above the scullery, by the side door, the big waste pipe ran down to the back garden, the cistern being over it ; that was John’s way into the house. Julie had heard him, she would not jump. The front door might be impossible, it was dangerous to open it, to fan the flames ; but there at the back he was safe enough, they were all safe.

But he did not know for how long the fire had been smouldering. Now he saw that the back

drawing-room too was all alight; the fire had started from below, the rolling smoke was black and threatening.

"Don't jump, I'm coming!" he had cried, and she had heard him, although it seemed long to her since the words had reached her. The smoke was grey here and curled up through the floor, and the house was full of it. The children, hastily awakened, whimpered and shivered, and asked if they were going to be burned; they coughed and complained that their eyes smarted, and they were frightened. It seemed long since she had heard John call, but she hushed them bravely.

"We are quite safe, Daddy is here; he is coming up to us soon, he will be here directly." But the minutes were leaden-footed.

John ran the short ladder against the side wall, and made the other man hold it steady for him. He had gained the waste pipe, hand over hand; now he was making for his objective. The excited crowd that watched did not realise what he was doing:

"It's the wrong wall, she's in front. Whatever is he going round there for?"

"Let him alone, it's his own house; trust him for knowing what he's about."

"He'll have to hurry."

He knew that, as yet, it was only smoke which he had to fight, on this side of the house. But the night air fanned the fire. It seemed as if

everything that had bothered him had vanished. His brain was quite clear now, wonderfully clear. It was for this his strength had been given, that he might climb up to those helpless ones.

He smashed the window with one blow of his fist, and, with hands bleeding from the broken glass, got quickly through into the lavatory. Here the smoke had hardly penetrated, but he met it again in the narrow passage, and he heard the ominous sound of crackling, while the smoke made darkness about him.

Of course he knew where Julie was, and what had happened. She had been aroused, and had awoke suddenly, the mother instinct waking with her. She had rushed upstairs to her children, the staircase might have been safe then, now the smoke rolled black about it. He could not find the handle of the nursery door, but the door itself yielded to his battering shoulder, jerry-built houses have their advantages.

"Here's Daddy, mother! Here's Daddy!"

They shouted to him, crying and shrill, and telling him they were afraid. But, as he spoke to them, and reassured them, his eyes met Julie's. She was very white, and her lips were pale, her eyes red and smarting. She smiled to him, nevertheless.

"I knew you would come," she said.

She had nearly lost her courage, just for half a moment, when the short ladder was below her, and the man had called to her to jump, and the

children, frantic with terror, besought her not to leave them. But, when she had seen John come running, and had recognised him in the moonlight, she was no longer afraid. Although she was so cold, and her legs were trembling, she was not afraid.

"The staircase is full of smoke. I shut the door so that it should not enter."

"It's all right. The fire is on the other side of the house. They are fetching up an escape; but there is plenty of time."

"I know. I am not at all afraid. Jane went for the firemen; Marie took baby. I rushed up here. I knew you would soon come, and I did not want them to be afraid."

There was more danger, however, than she realised. The open window had fanned the flames, as, indeed, he had feared, and Jane or Marie must have opened other doors or windows. He heard again the ominous crackling, and as he stood with her an instant at the window he saw that the crowd in his front garden, behind and in front of the wooden gate, had increased.

"We must get out over the cistern, down by the scullery," he said quickly; "it's all right, come along." He caught her up; it was for this that his strength had been given him.


"The children first, dear." She was brave and calm; she was right in his heart.

"All together !"

He made her take Génie in her arms, then he took them both in his. Jack must climb on his back, they must all hold tight round his neck. Thus laden, it seemed the joy of life had come back to him again ; he laughed and joked with them all as he made for the passage.

The night nursery was barely furnished, the three beds, the deal drawers, the japanned washstands, held nothing inflammable. One saw the boards of the ill-laid floor, and the strips of the new linoleum. It was through the chinks in the floor that the smoke curled, smarting their eyes, choking their throat, but there was no flame here. As he passed the washstands, he told his wife and children to hold on to him, tightly, while he shoved the towels quickly into the water-jug, bidding Jack to put one over his head, and Julie to cover her face and Génie's with the other.

He got out of the room with his burden ; now that the smoke had filled the narrow passage he could hardly see. But they were easy, with their wet towels. The wind had rushed in through the window he had broken, and more and more ominous grew the sounds of breaking glass, of falling masonry, of a roar that was like the wind. He thought the firemen would have run the escape by the scullery window by now, but no ! there the short ladder stood, ten feet below him, and now, on this side, too, the smoke curled.



"Hold tight ! Whatever you do, hold tight !"

There was no time to be lost; but it wasn't necessary to tell them that. He kept their courage up with his steady voice.

"Lucky you've got a wet towel, Jack ! it will save you washing in the morning. It's smutty about here, I tell you that. You may think it's fun, but I expect I shall look like a nigger."

The climb down, even with his burden, was easier than the climb up. For, after all, he had them all with him and he could trust himself to carry them into safety. His spirits were surprisingly light. He was holding his place, and doing his work. The waste pipe held well.

"Don't throttle me," he called to Jack ; "we'll be on dry land in a jiff."

"It isn't *like* dry land," said Génie, solemnly, from beneath her wet towel.

Now he had his feet on the ladder ; it had only needed care, he knew that, as he slid down the waste pipe with them. He had had to keep his hands free, the whole three of them hanging round his neck, like jewels on a chain. He was glad to find his feet on the ladder, he was gladder still when the gravel crunched beneath his feet, and he could swing them lightly down one after the other.

"Lucky it's a warm night," he said. "You didn't make much of a toilette, did you ?"


Julie shivered in her bed jacket, and Jack and

Génie were in their nightgowns. He purposely brought them to commonplaces, for Julie, in safety, grew hysterical, and clung to him, and Génie trembled and cried, and only Jack thought it was great fun.

But there were kindly neighbours about, thoughtful ones, too, with blankets and warm wraps, and profuse offers of hospitality. A group of these stood, talking excitedly, for a few minutes after John had brought his family down in safety. One had smelt the smoke, and another had dreamed of flame; and all had spare rooms or spare beds, and pressed hospitality on them.

Meanwhile the crowd stood, and John and his family stood always a little further off, and again further, watching the growing fire; care was necessary, bricks were beginning to fall, the smoke was increasing. They stood and watched the windows blacken with smoke, and the flames increase. There was no water for the hand engine, and part of the hydrant could not be found; the doomed house crackled, and John knew that the roar, which was as of wind, was the roar of the flames that were increasing in intensity, that inside the house were licking up and destroying the home where he had once been so happy.

It was not until the house was well alight, and at last, in the distance, they heard the shouts of the firemen, the quick trot of the horses' feet, the rattle of the harness, that some one asked carelessly



where were the servants, how had they got out ?

"It was Jane who heard it first, and rushed to give the alarm. She called out to Marie, and Marie came down to me. Marie took baby. I went to our children."

Even now, at such a moment, it did him good to hear that she had left the baby to Marie, that it was to *his* children she had rushed.

The engine pulled up with a rattle, and the firemen leapt to their places. Whence Marie came he did not know, he realised only that she was on her knees at Julie's feet, and that her words were broken. For the moment he was all confused. He saw Julie seize hold of Marie and shake her, then scream out, like an animal in pain, and seize Marie again, as if she would tear her to pieces ; he wrested his eyes from his blazing home.

"What is it ? What is it, Julie ?" he asked. "Hush ! you must not do that. Are you mad ?"

For Marie was kneeling at Julie's feet, her eyes streaming ; and Julie, his sweet and gentle Julie, was pounding her in the face with both hands, was beating on her with her fists, and moaning, and wildly talking :

"Oh ! she has left my baby behind, the *monstre*, the wicked woman. *Levez-vous ! Allez-vous en !* I hate you, I hate you ! I am going myself ; I am going to fetch it. John, leave me go."

She struggled against him, but he held her,

grasped her beating hands, and tried to quiet her frenzy against his breast.

"Julie, my dear, look for yourself, it's impossible. You have the others, see, you are frightening Génie, Jack is looking at you." For indeed at that instant it did not seem serious to him that the croupier's baby had been forgotten.

"My baby, my *mignonne*, my little baby! I want it, I must go. John, I must!"

She struggled, she bit at his restraining hand.

Marie was sobbing.

"Oh! Madame, *pardonnez-moi*, the smoke it was *effrayante*! I ran after Madame, *pour l'avertir*, but Madame was so quick. She was up the stairs, and I, I could not get back to the room." She wrung her hands. "Madame *ne veut pas me regarder*. See! *Je suis brûler*. I went back but I could not . . ."

"John." She tried to be calm, because her heart was bursting. He would not hold her so tight if she was calm.

"Let me go, John, *cheri*." But still he held her against him, and the flames died and leapt, and leapt again in the doomed house.

"My dear, my dearest," he said.

The pity in his voice made her quiet against his breast, she heard the beating of his heart. Surely, surely he did not want, he did not mean that because of how the baby had come . . . No, no! *her* John, she wronged him. She kissed the

hands at which she had bit in her struggle, the tears streamed down from her eyes upon them.

"Oh! John, forgive me. But it is my baby; I cannot, cannot leave it there."

"Look for yourself," he said sullenly, he knew what was in his mind. It was God's answer, it was that for which he had asked. The baby would die. He remembered dully his dream in the sea. Well! it wasn't his fault, he had done nothing to bring it about, he had fetched out his own! His heart was beating thick and quick. As if she knew its treachery, she would not rest against it or hide her head against it from the doomed house.

But still she begged to him, prayed to him, knelt to him, and clasped his knees. And the voices of the neighbours broke on his ears through her prayers. The flames were eloquent, they reddened the sky. The engine was in position now, the hydrant fixed, but still the flames shot into the night, and defied the water.

"You don't mean to say they've left the baby up there?"

"Oh! the poor darling!" There was the sound of women crying.

"The firemen will fetch it, if there's a chance," some one said, quite subdued.

"It's too late now, I'm afraid;" and the masculine voice was shaken.

And still she was begging to him, praying to him.

"Oh ! John, John, you won't let it die, *seul*, up there ? You won't ? it is not like you, you won't ? It is alone, in its little cradle, John ! Let me go, let me die with it, at least. Oh ! darling, darling John, I feel what is in your heart. *You are not sorry ! I cannot bear it.*"

A man must hold his own ! What was his own ? Up there one risked one's life. But of what value was life, if one had lost one's self-esteem, and one's wife's love ?

"You can't do it, John," she moaned against his feet. "You can't let it die. It was for this your strength was given you."

Out from her mouth leapt the message that he had heard in the sea, startling him, shocking him into action. His indecision, his spasm of temptation was gone.

"No, I suppose I can't," he said.

She knew now she had read his heart beats aright.

"I'll get back, you stop here. It will be all right." 'So a man keeps his manhood.'

But then she saw the smoke, and smothered flame, and suddenly clung to him again, and held him, even as he had held her.

"No ! no ! no ! you must not go."

His heart leapt again when she bade him stay, and clung to him again. *So a man holds his own.* His temples throbbed, but his vision was wondrous clear, this was why he had not been allowed to

waste his life, why the waves had flung him back.

"Here, let go ; we mustn't waste time, Marie ! see to her. Génie, Jack, take care of her."

A hush fell upon them, and upon the little crowd that watched with them beyond the gate, John kissed his wife.

"Take care of her," he said. Some man pressed forward, and held out his hand to him, but John did not notice it.

This, then, was the answer to all his doubts. He had known that the night held a message for him. Well ! a man can die only once. And she was right ; he could not leave the little helpless thing that she had borne, in the hell of flame up there, without making some effort for its succour. There are some things a man can't do, and this was one of them.

He shouldered his way through the crowd, thrilled to a sudden quiet. He heard the whispers :

"The baby is up there."

"He is going back."

"The firemen will never let him go."

"You watch. If John Courtney means a thing, he'll do it."

He got through the gate, whither they had dragged the hose, and some of the crowd surged in after him, curious to watch. The escape had not yet come, for nobody knew there was any one left in the house. Those men in helmets,

waiting for the escape, used to danger, told him he must go no further, it was not safe. He thrust them aside. Well! he could see for himself. They let him look, scanning his big figure, moved by his grey face.

There was no escape; but there was a long ladder, from which a fireman, hose in hand, was playing on the roof, while another, half way up, stood there to call out warning. John ran lightly up after them. The man on the ladder tried to obstruct him, to make him go back. But the strength of the man on the ladder was as nothing to John's, who went on climbing coolly. The flames roared, they were like the sea in his ears. It was for this then that the sea had not held him, but had borne him back, and cast him on the shore. He had a contract to keep; the baby was part of it. He had said he would forgive everything, forget everything, and he had forgiven nothing, but remembered everything. This, however, was his chance. It isn't every fellow gets a chance given him. If it were to be done, he would do it. Up, and ever up, fighting flame and smoke, he slowly won.

Because he did not want the baby in his house, because he had wished its death, he was ashamed. He had broken his promise in the spirit, if not in the letter. He felt now that he had been a cur over it. God! how the smoke belched out, trying to beat him back, and fighting with him inch by inch for





foothold ! He heard a crash from inside the house. That must be the drawing-room ceiling ; the staircase must be a mass of flames. The smoke was hot, and burnt his face as if it had been flame. But now his hand was on the sill ; the heat had broken the window, and he was quickly in the room. He did not hear the cheer go up as he disappeared through the window.

How quiet the room was, just as he had pictured it ; but the smoke confused him. They were playing on this side of the house, the other was hopeless. He heard the swish and fall of the water as it pattered on the floor above his head. The room was full of smoke, black and venomous, smarting his eyes, burning his throat. Sparks were falling, they burnt his grey hair in patches, and his coat, too, was burning. He groped his way to where, in his drowning dream, the cradle had stood, and he found it there, enveloped in smoke. He did not wait longer than to feel that the bundle of flannel lay in its place, and to snatch it to his arms. It was for this his strength had been given him ! But the room swayed about him, as it had swayed in his dream. If he had not promised her, if he did not owe it its life, because he had failed in his promise to her, how good, how easy it would be to lie down, to rest, to dream again ! . . .

It was lucky the firemen had followed him, for the smoke had overwhelmed him. He had saved

the baby; the bundle was in his arms. The flames were dying out, the water had conquered them, but it was the smoke that had overpowered John.

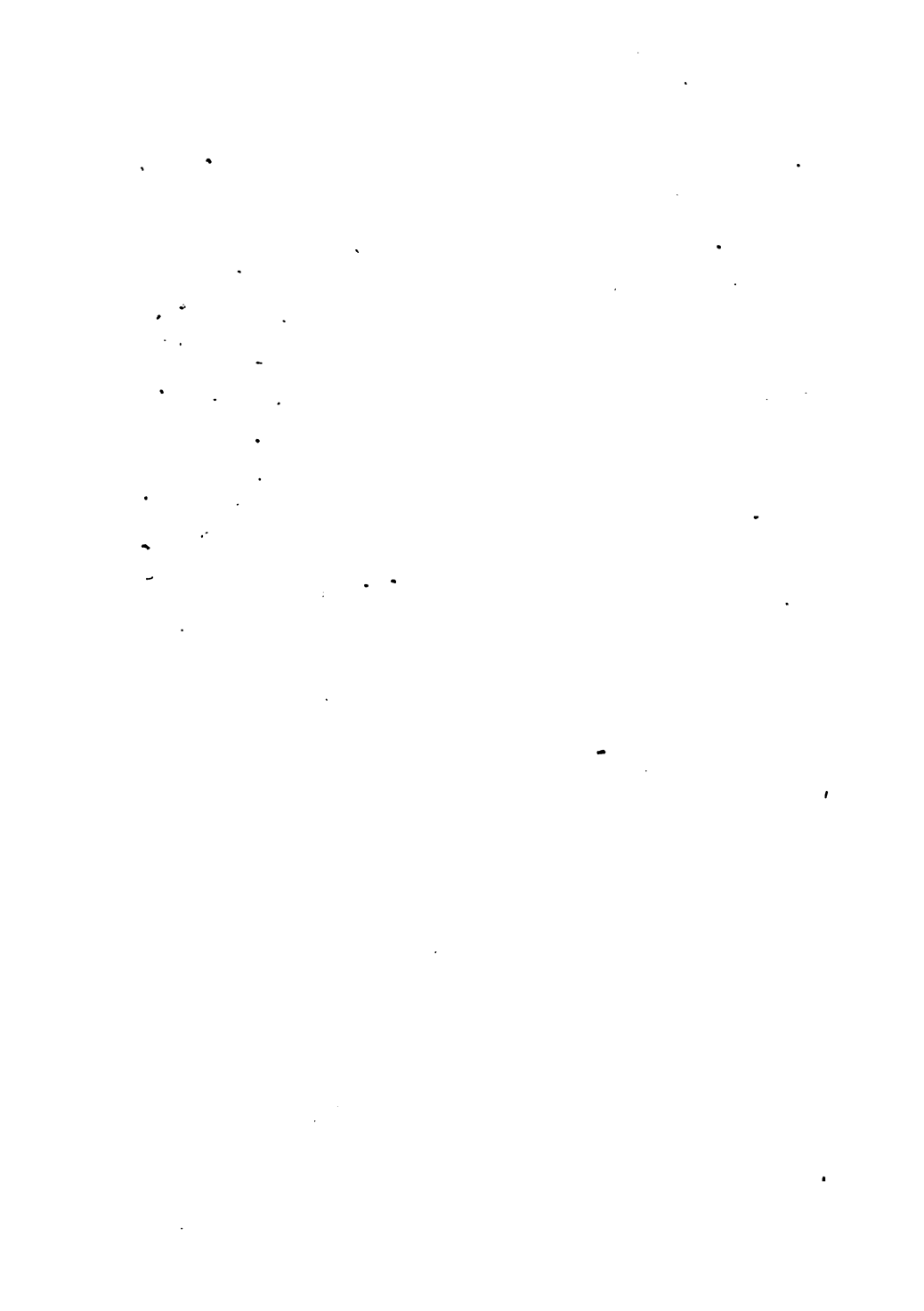
When they dragged him out, and dashed water on him, and forced brandy down his throat, he still clung to his burden. He must give it back to Julie himself.

"Leave me alone! let me get to her!" that was all he said, struggling to his feet, semi-conscious.

They made a pathway for him, men standing with uncovered heads, women with streaming eyes. He was a pitiable figure, black, burnt, staggering, with the bundle in his arms, the baby that was already cold and stiff, and had been dead for hours.

Nevertheless, he had braved death for it. In the years to come he could remember that he had won, not stolen, his peace, that a man must fight for his own, and that he had fought for, and won, his.

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